The story of the

sinclair ZX Spectrum

in pixels_

Chris Wilkins


sinclair

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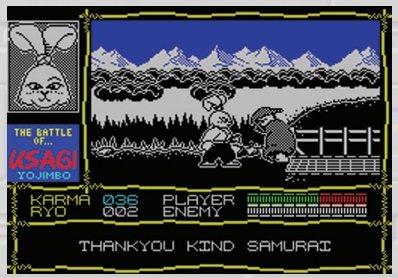
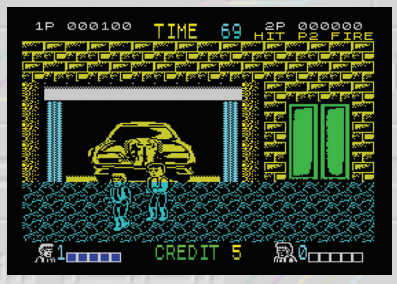




Martyn Carroll

The Lost Art of the Loading Screen

Just when you thought it was safe to fire up the SodaStream! Former Retro Gamer editor Martyn Carroll looks back at those glorious loading screens that kept us glued to our seats as Spectrum games loaded.

In Volume 1 of this book series I wrote about growing up with the Spectrum and how it was life-affirming and magical and all that. The only time the rose-tinted glasses fell off was when talking about tapes. I hated tapes. They were slow and feeble things, taking an age to do their thing and often failing at some point. That's why I hankered after a Spectrum +3 when it was announced. I wanted my games on whizzy disks rather than rubbish tapes.

Yet I overlooked something crucial. I might have bemoaned tapes but I loved loading screens. For me those screens were an integral part of the game along with the packaging, the audio and even the code itself. They certainly featured prominently in my new game ritual, where I'd briefly admire the cover-art of my latest purchase before whacking in the tape and waiting for the loading process to begin. In the early days before the advent of fast loading routines you'd often see the image slowly form on screen, line by line, as if a crazy artist was flicking paint at a canvas. And then as the shrill loading noise reached a crescendo, colour would wash down the screen and the artist's work was unveiled in brilliant 'Specnicolor'.

Misshapen hero *Horace* features in a typically simple screen from 1982.

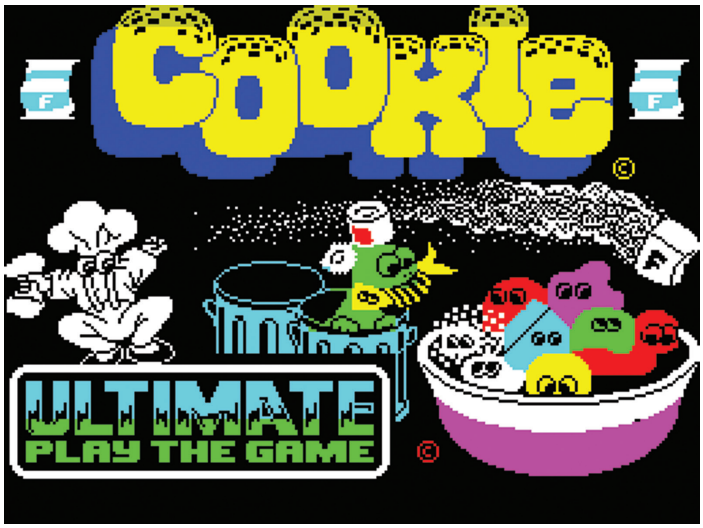
Not every loading screen was a work of art, of course. But when they were good they could truly make an impression, like the fine examples used to illustrate these words. The Spectrum's high-res display allowed pixel artists to create detailed screens, and as they were static, attribute clash could be discreetly concealed by the careful placement of colour. And what colour! The full Spectrum palette could be showcased, including those lovely, often overlooked BRIGHT variants. There was no need for monochrome compromises on

loading screens.

I'm guessing most Spectrum owners appreciated and valued a good loading screen. The 7Kb of code that made up a screen might have added an extra 30 seconds or so to the overall loading time but it was totally worth it. A quality screen could not salvage a terrible game, but it might soften the blow a little bit – I'm thinking titles like *Kung-Fu Master*, *Gutz* and *Cisco Heat*. Similarly, a poor screen might take the shine off a great game, as in *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, *The Great Escape* and *Jack the Nipper II*. Some stone cold classics like *Ant Attack* and *Jet Set Willy* didn't even feature a loading screen. In fact, with a lot of early releases you were lucky to get a "Please Wait" message and it was an extra special treat if it flashed.

Loading screens went from being an unexpected treat to a prerequisite fairly early in the Spectrum's life. This was mainly thanks to the press who would often mention the loading screen (or lack of) in their reviews when appraising the game's overall presentation. As such, it would be silly for developers not to include a loading screen – even if it was just a crude, hurried illustration like you'd see on the *Horace* games and other early titles.

Jetpac was the game that changed all that. Ultimate's debut was a hugely significant release that showed everyone that the Spectrum was capable of running arcade-quality games. It also featured a striking loading screen by Tim Stamper that was closely based on his own *Jetpac* inlay art. Tim was clearly a very talented artist and he apparently had little difficulty in translating his work to the Spectrum screen. The detail in *Jetman* was impressive and even included the reflection of the lunar landscape on his visor.



According to Ste Pickford, Tim Stamper designed his screens using graph paper and felt tips.

Each highly-anticipated Ultimate release featured one of Tim's loading screens and they were generally excellent (*Sabre Wulf* was a little disappointing with its comical tiger but it did at least fit the tone of the game). Ultimate set the bar high when it came to quality loading

Jetman, and Ultimate, have landed! *Jetpac* set the standard for polished loading screens.

F.D Thorpe's first screen for his debut game *Royal Birkdale: Championship Golf*.

screens and for a while few were able to match it. There was one artist, however, who rose to the challenge and quickly became the go-to guy when a developer wanted a top notch screen.

Frederick David Thorpe was an architect and illustrator who discovered computers in his mid-40s. His first game, *Royal Birkdale: Championship Golf*, was published by Ocean in December 1983. The game was written in BASIC, which was fitting as the graphics and the game itself were very basic indeed. But the loading screen, which depicted the Royal Birkdale clubhouse, was in a different class and easily the best thing about the whole package. It had a photo quality about it and Ocean's David Ward asked him to create screens for some of the titles the firm had in development.

That decision saw Thorpe create dozens of memorable screens for Ocean, including classics like *Pogo*, *Eskimo Eddie*, *Nightmare Rally* and *Head over Heels*. In all these examples he had Bob Wakelin's excellent artwork as source material, but it wasn't as easy as just copying Bob's work. The orientation needed to be changed from portrait to landscape for a start, so Thorpe would sketch out a rough design on squared paper first. He'd then use commercial art package *Melbourne Draw* to slowly create the screen on the Spectrum. The biggest challenge was carefully positioning elements to avoid ugly colour clashes, bearing in mind that only two colours could be used in any one 8x8 pixel square. Take a look at his screen for *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and just imagine how difficult it was to create the interlocking Olympic Rings on the Spectrum.

The whole process would take Thorpe around 20 hours and before long his work was in such demand that he was able to

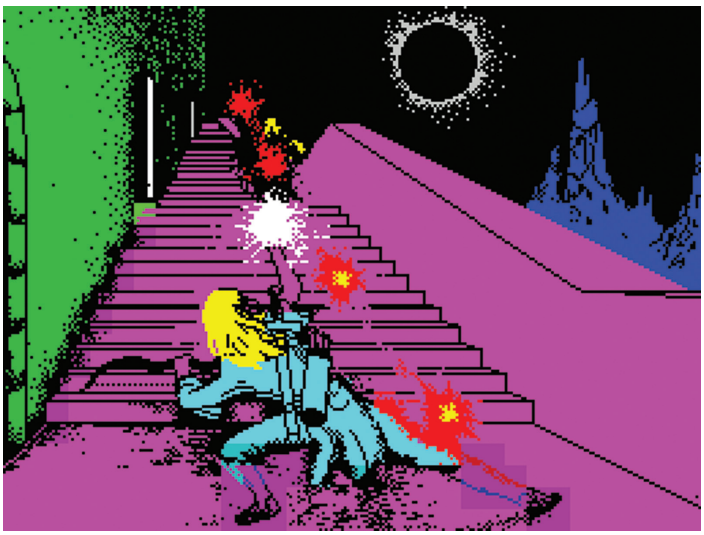
Do not adjust your set. Berk's eyes really do move as *Trap Door* loads.

According to Thorpe, the Ocean bosses applauded when they first saw this screen for *Rambo*!

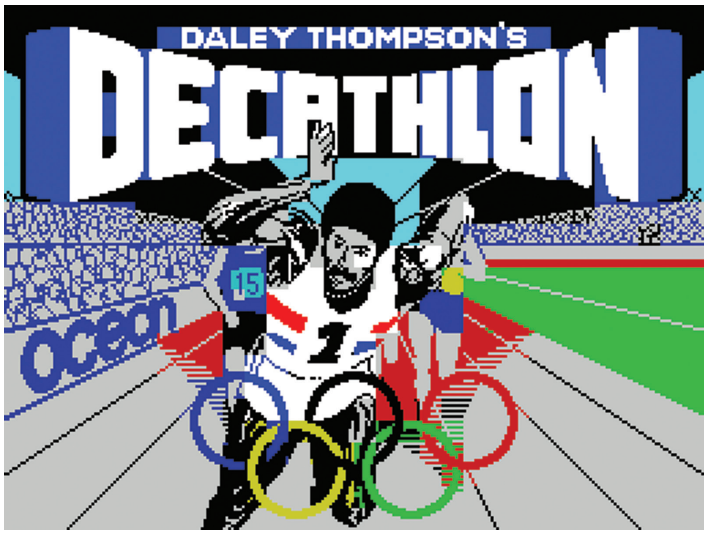
give up his day job and concentrate on screens full time. He worked freelance, so although he was mainly connected to Ocean he also drew screens for other developers including US Gold. The screens for *Beach Head II*, *The Dam Busters*, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Spy Hunter* were clearly brilliant and unmistakably Thorpe.

As in-house development teams grew, the likes of Ocean would use their graphic artists to create screens. Ocean's Mark R. Jones created screens for several games including *Wizball, Mag Max* and *Arkanoid: Revenge of Doh*, and it was a task he particularly enjoyed. "The loading screen was done once you'd completed all of the in-game graphics," he told me. "It was the 'treat' at the end, the thing you looked forward to doing once all of the hard work had been done. You didn't have a programmer saying 'you can't have that', or 'that's too big'. You were only limited by how good you were."

It would typically take him two days to produce a screen, but because he was usually waiting for the programmer to finish coding, he would spend longer getting them just right. "I tinkered with them for weeks!" he says. "The programmer could have another month of coding to do so you had to go to work and try and find things to do." He reveals that Thorpe's style was an inspiration, although his approach differed somewhat. "I don't remember anyone messing about with graph paper," he reveals. "I used to get the artwork, think of how I was going to change it from portrait to landscape and then just start. If something didn't look right it was quite easy to move it to somewhere else on the screen. Then if you had an annoying attribute clash you could shift things one pixel to the left, one pixel to the right. Sometimes you had to make



Setting the scene in style in this dramatic screen for *Hall of the Things*.



Olympic hero Daley Thompson is brought to life on the Spectrum by F.D Thorpe.

heads and arms thicker, so they took up the whole or more of the character square and lessen the clash."

For his screen work Jones used the standard art packages: *Melbourne Draw*, *The Artist II* and *OCP Art Studio*. He also used the keyboard rather than a mouse. In short, there were no special tools or secret techniques. If he was struggling he would sometimes trace an outline onto acetate and then stick the acetate onto the screen and copy the outline. But basically, anyone with a Spectrum, some art software and a chunk of free time could create something. As Jones says, it just came down to how capable and creative you were. I imagine most Spectrum owners created loading screens for their own projects, even if the games themselves never progressed beyond a rough idea and a few lines of code.

That said, there were some loading sequences that baffled and amazed. I am of course talking about loaders that featured animation. Everyone remembers *Manic Miner*, where the two words of the title flashed on screen as the game loaded. When I saw this as kid I presumed dark magic was at work.

Manic Miner was soon outdone by *Technician Ted* with its tiny army of Teds running left and right across the screen – as the game loaded! It was also the first game to display a loading counter, so you knew how long you had to wait for the game to load. Witchcraft, I tell thee.

Technician Ted follow-up *Costa Capers* introduced a loading scheme called 'Multiload' which was used in several games and displayed a series of printed messages on screen (including game instructions and control information). Some traditional loading screens featured subtle animation, such as Berk's eyes

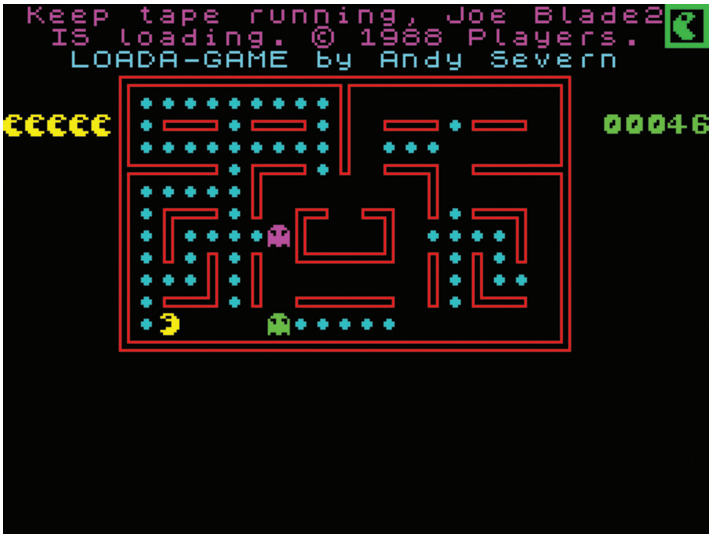
Man – or rather Ted – alive! The gobsmacking animated intro for *Technician Ted*.

moving and blinking on *Trapdoor,* and the glowing rocket trail on *Tau Ceti* sequel *Academy*.

A number of games deviated from the usual loading screen top-to-bottom reveal. The screen for *Mask*, for example, was drawn from the bottom up. *Into the Eagle's Nest* then muscled in and said: "Okay MASK, I'll take your upwards reveal and give you a diagonal reveal!". And then *Bobby Bearing* rolled up and said: "I'll take your diagonal reveal and give you a snaking-in-from-opposites-sides reveal – plus a scrolling text message. Huzzah!". Probably the most extraordinary loader appeared on an otherwise unexceptional budget title. As *Joe Blade II* loaded you could play a mini game of *Pac-Man*! The Spectrum couldn't emulate the Commodore 64 and have loading music but at least it had a rival for the famous Invade-a-Load routine.

In later years digitisation was used more and more in loading screens. This was where the actual artwork was converted to the Spectrum. Good examples are some of Ocean's later film licenses like *Rambo III*, *Batman the Movie* and *Total Recall* where the main character looked too good, or at least too realistic, to have been drawn by hand. There were various methods of digitising images – at Ocean they'd capture the artwork using a video camera and transfer the image to the Spectrum via an Amiga. The monochrome image would then be coloured in the usual way and the game title and company logos would be added to finish it off.

Raid over Moscow, a masterclass in perspective from F.D Thorpe.



Who'd a thunk it? Playing *Pac-Man* as *Joe Blade II* loads.

Digitisation was the main reason why Frederick David Thorpe left the industry around 1987 – he felt that his skills were no longer required because the original artwork was being converted rather than interpreted. Ironically, the imported

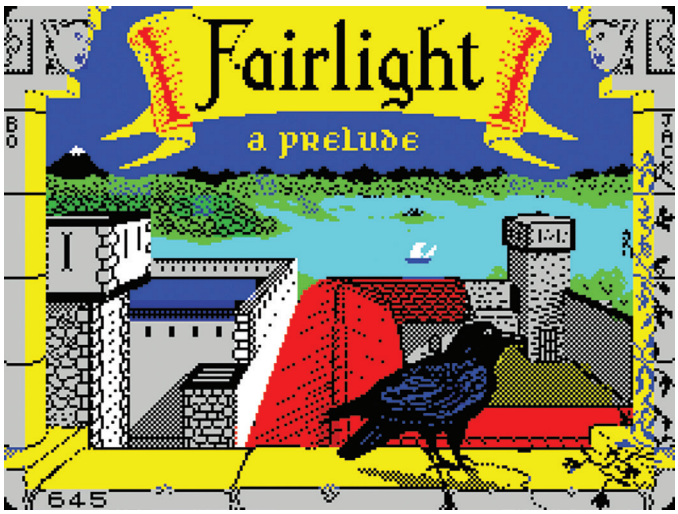
Bob Wakelin's stunning *Nightmare Rally* art is recreated with verve.

digital image was often so scrappy that it was more work to tidy it up than it might have been to create from scratch! If tidied up with care the results were undeniably impressive, yet for me they lacked the personality and panache of a screen that was solely drawn by hand.

Loading screens remain a staple in Spectrum games. Homebrew titles rarely release without one and in recent years a number of enthusiasts have created new screens for games that had a lacklustre offering first time round. The modern loading screens for the likes of *Space Harrier*, *The Hobbit* and *The Great Escape* are pretty amazing.

So you may well be wondering at this point, "Carroll, what's this 'lost art' you speak of?". Well I'm glad you asked. All of the screens, good or bad, are preserved of course, but I feel we've forgone the simple pleasure of seeing screens as games load. Whether you emulate or use a flash card device on real hardware, games typically load in an instant. Loading times are a thing of the past and loading screens are an unfortunate casualty of that. But they don't have to be. The next time you play a Spectrum game why not let it load in full? It only takes a few minutes after all. Sit back and wait for the screen to materialise in front of your eyes and think back to the very first time you played the game and how the screen fired your imagination ahead of the main event.

This time was never wasted; this time was precious.



In a novel touch, the *Fairlight* loading screen gave players a glimpse of the castle's sprawling layout.

Behind the Screens: Wizball

1: Having received Bob Wakelin's artwork, Ocean's Mark R. Jones began by adding the key elements – the main characters and the title text – to the screen.

2: Here Mark added extra shading to *Wizball* and drew in the trail behind Catellite on the right. The cat and some aliens were also added.

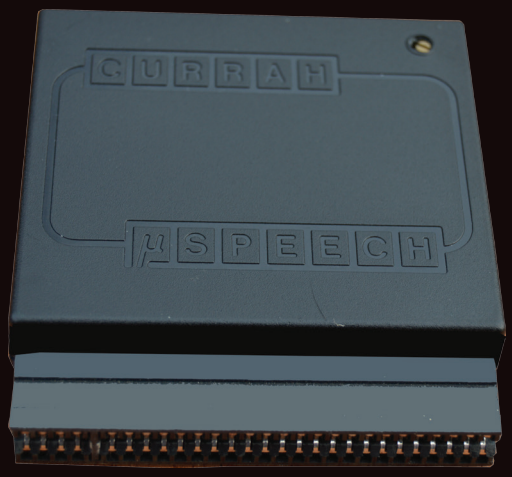
3: Many extra stars were added to fill the black background and some blue bubbles appeared next to Catellite (these would soon change).

4: The finished screen! Craters were added to the moon's surface and the title was switched to yellow. Can you spot all of the other changes?

The peripherals

Currah µSpeech

If you wanted to have your Spectrum talk to you then this device was the answer – each key press on the keyboard results in the TV relaying in robotic voice the selection. Specific words or phrases can be programmed.



Lo Profile Keyboard

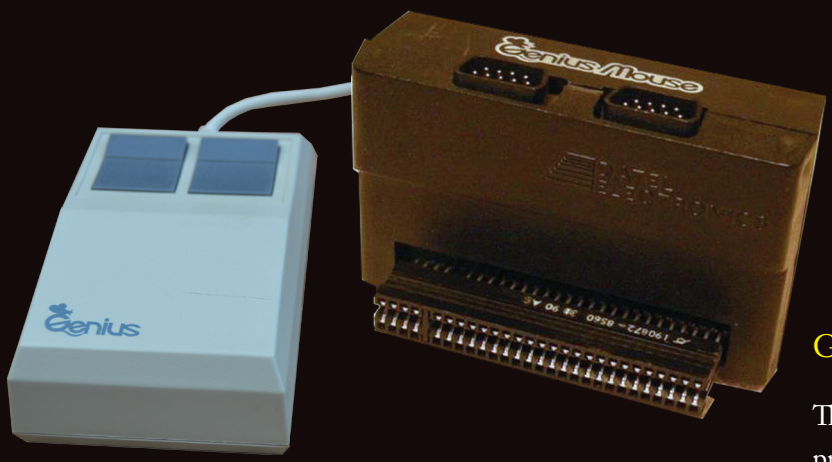
An alternative to the Spectrum's original keyboard, or the many other external keyboards available, the Lo Profile fitts over the base of the computer and offers a 'real' keyboard to the owner.

Slomo Programmable Pacesetter

This device allows the not so honest gamer to cheat by slowing the more difficult titles down, thus getting past the difficult end of level boss. Also includes a joystick interface on the side.

PRISM VTX 5000 Modem

The PRISM modem was designed to give Spectrum users access to the Micronet 800 closed user database on Prestel. This meant that Spectrum users could chat with each other, read news and reviews and play simple online games.



Genius Mouse

The Genius mouse adds precision to packages like T*he Artist 2* that we just take for granted today.

DK'Tronics 3-Channel Synthesiser

This device added a 3-Channel sound chip to the 48K ZX Spectrum many years before the 128K version of the computer arrived. The speaker also amplified the 48K beeper giving games a new lease of life.

The trench ajourning the cover of Issue 5 of Crash magazine by Oliver Frey.

THE GAMES

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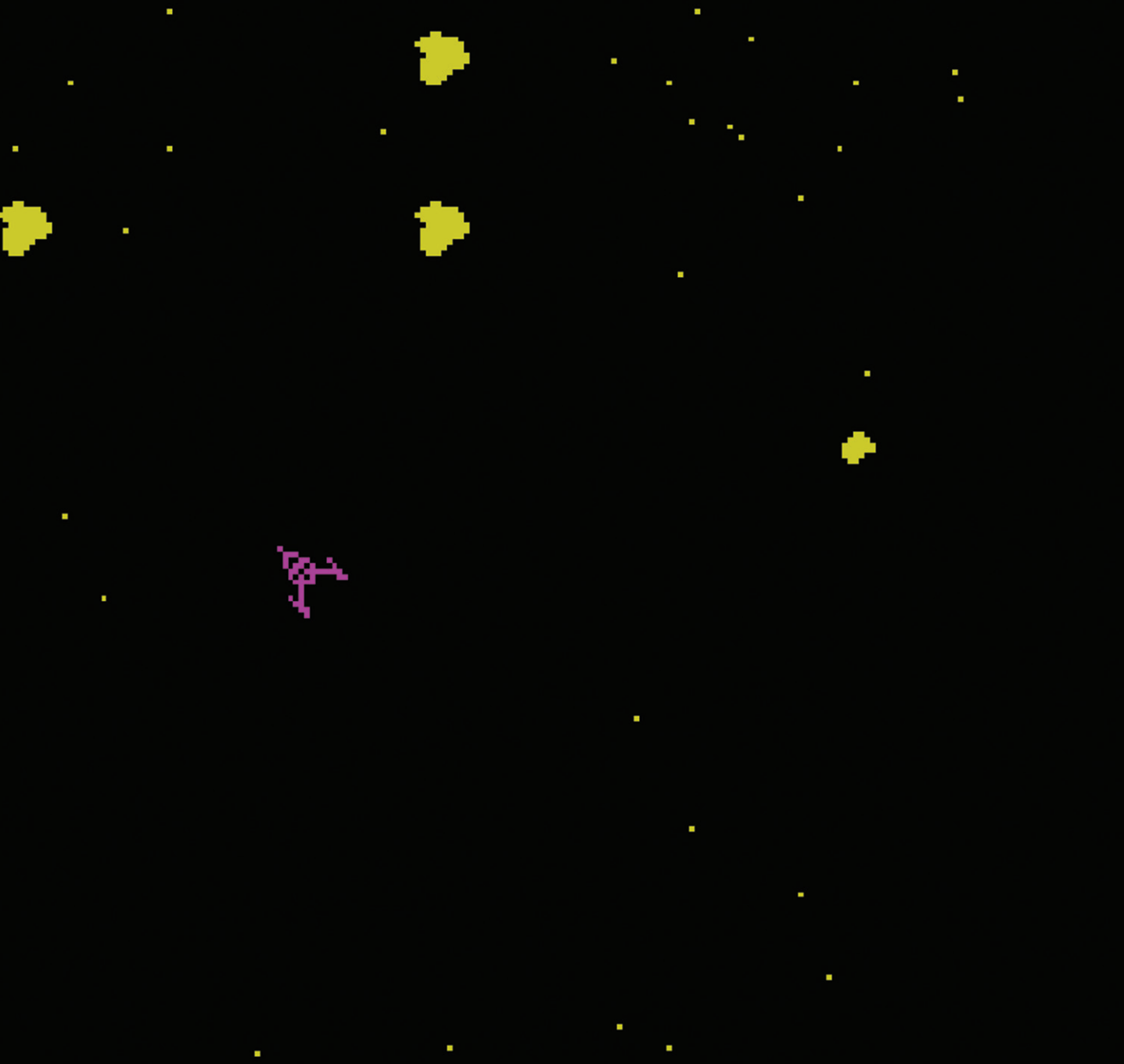
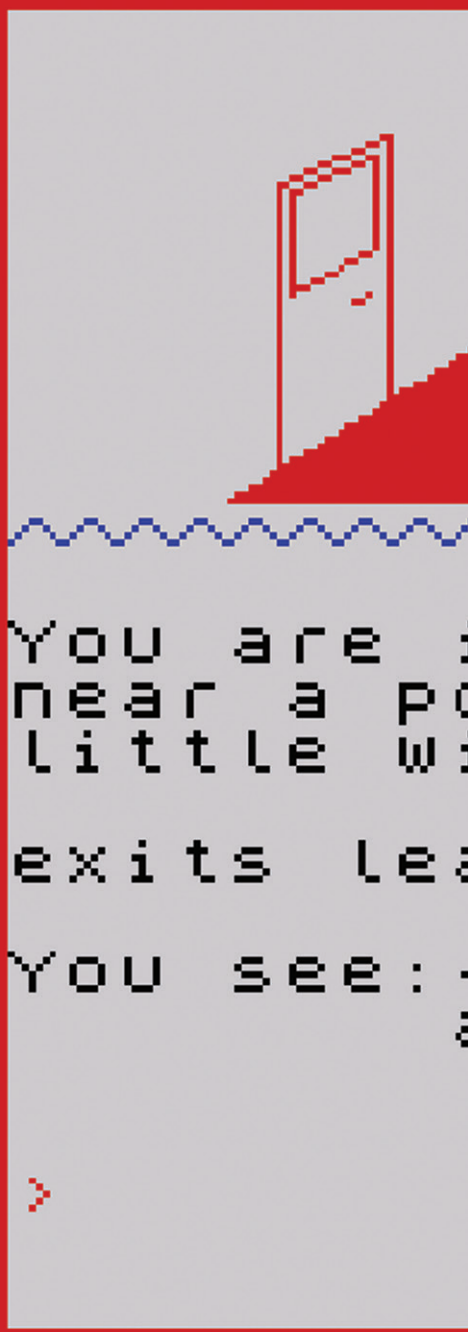
Name	:	Planetoids
Year	:	1982
Publisher	:	Sinclair Research
Author	:	Psion Software Ltd

There was never any pretence that *Planetoids* was anything other than a direct *Asteroids* clone. Not even the title made much of an effort to camouflage the fact. But this was the early days of home gaming, and in 1982, if a system – whether computer or console – didn't have a version of *Asteroids*, its sales were going to be unfairly affected. The brain trust at Sinclair Research understood this dilemma intimately, and so the computer manufacturer itself decided to publish Psion Software's take on the asteroid-blasting arcade smash. And for good reason; this was an austere, yet faithful *Asteroids* clone. The ship lacked the inertia that made the original feel so sci-fi, but physics aside it delivered on the rock-splitting action dutifully. As the game progressed, the asteroids… er, sorry, planetoids got faster and faster, and that gave it just the right amount of arcade challenge. No, there's little that's original about *Planetoids*, but it was a necessary addition to the Speccy's early line-up of games, and undoubtedly helped it to become the living room legend we knew and loved.

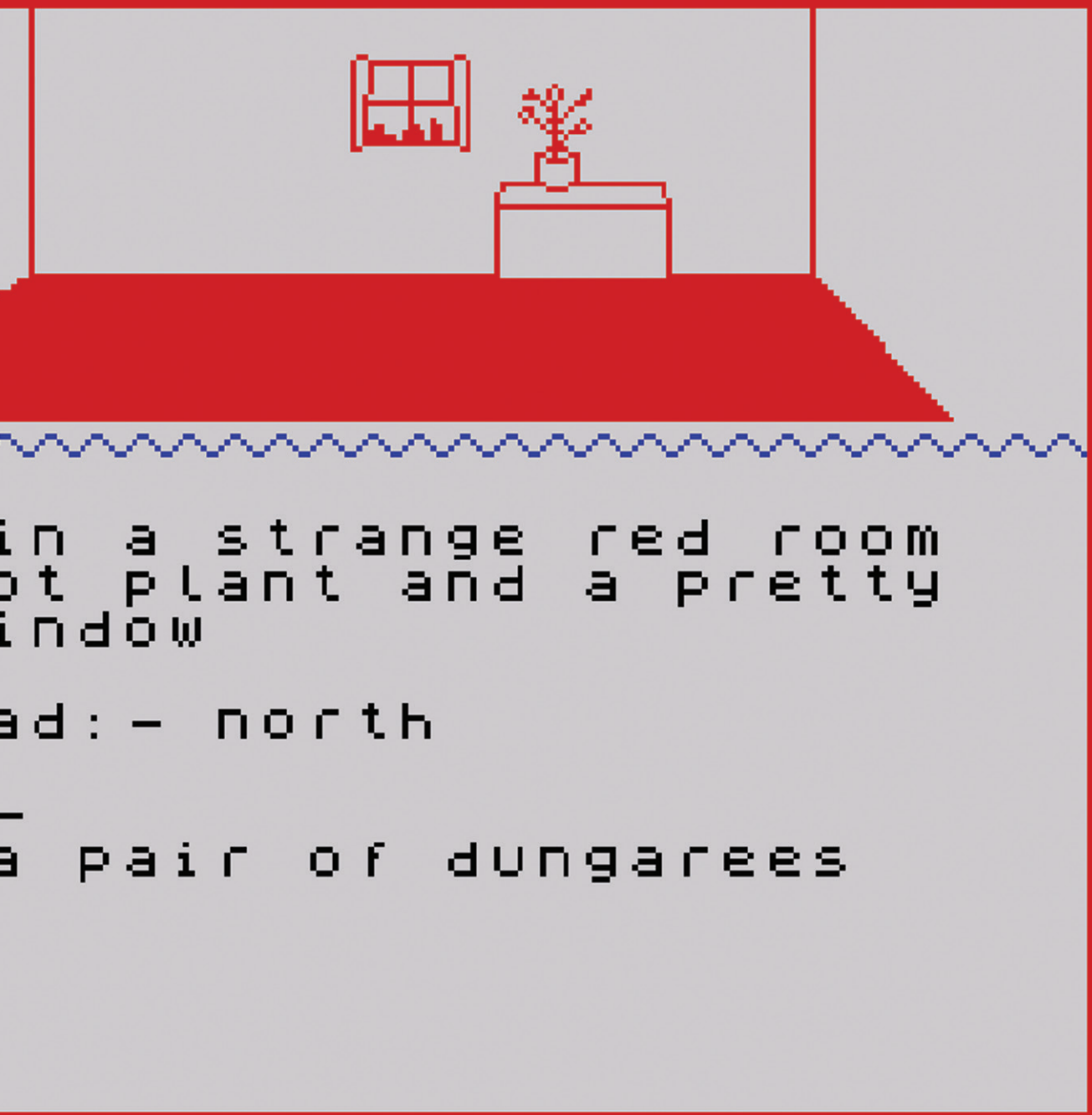


RICHARD SHEPHERD SOFTWARE

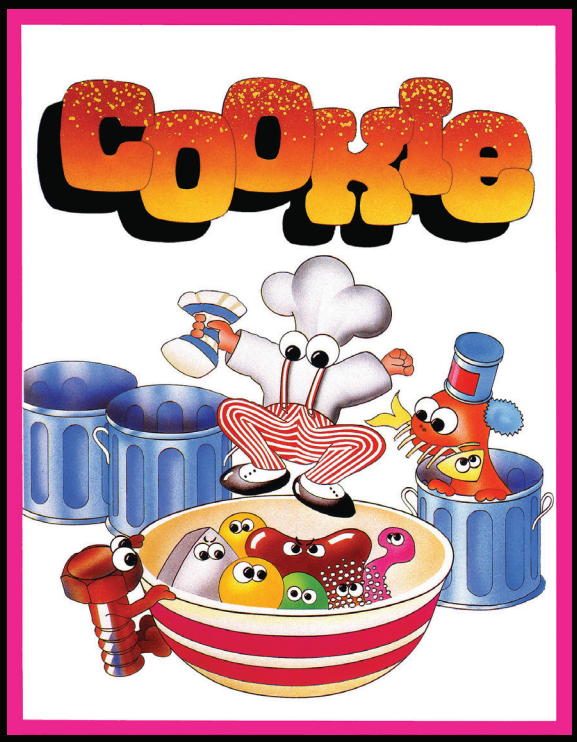
Name	:	Urban Upstart
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Richard Shepherd Software
Author	:	Pete Cooke

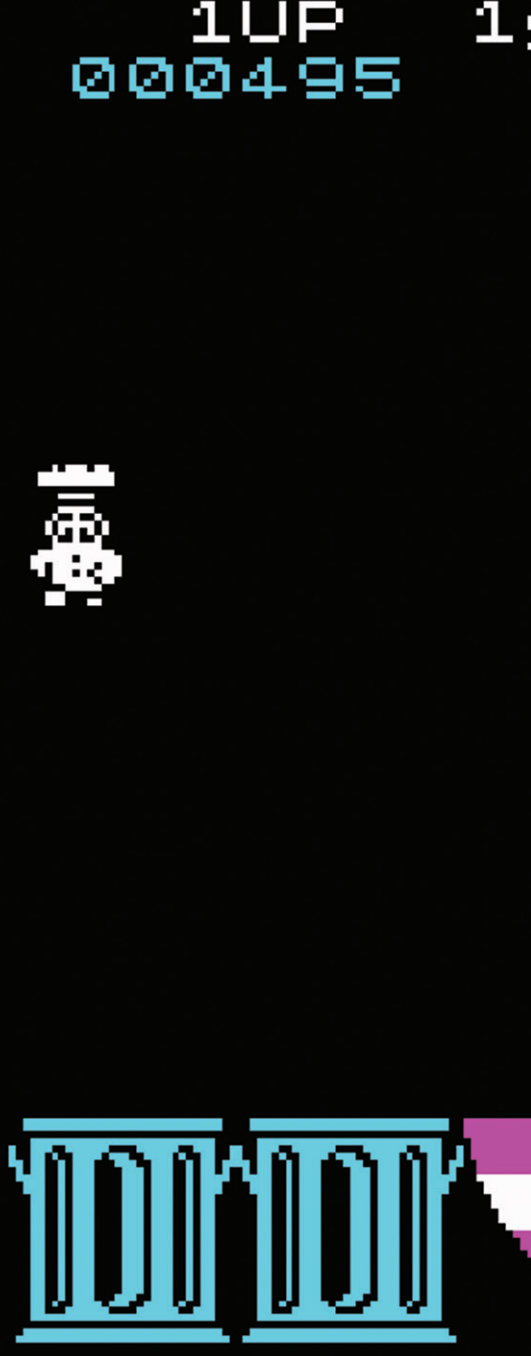


Before he became famous for creating marvellous technological feats such as *Tau Ceti*, *Academy* and *Micronaut 1*, Pete Cooke learned his trade coding adventure games such as *Invincible Island*, *The Inferno* and this story of inner-city depression, tinged with a wicked sense of humour. *Urban Upstart* begins with the famous phrase, 'Scarthorpe is the sort of town where even the dogs carry flick knives', hinting at a violent, yet satiric look at municipal life. Cooke, fed up with the endless stream of fantasy-set adventure games, had decided it would be novel to create a modern setting reflecting the woes and ills of a Thatcherite suburban nightmare. Scarthorpe was a combination of many of the examples of urban misery that Cooke had either experienced or seen on television. Playing an unnamed character, your task was merely to escape Scarthorpe. Sounds easy? Not when there's only one road in, and it's a one-way street! Each location contains a functional graphic and the game's parser proves flexible enough so as not to curb enjoyment. Like many adventures it isn't easy – regular trips to the police station are guaranteed!



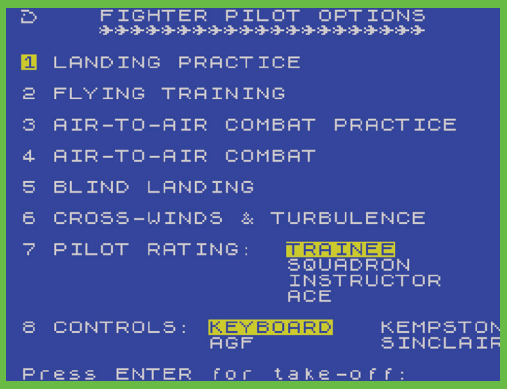
Name	:	Cookie
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Ultimate Play The Game
Author	:	Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper



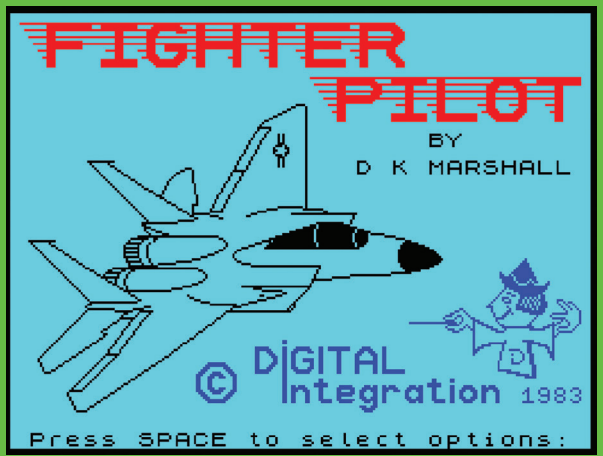


Finding new ways to make inoffensive games that are accessible to a younger audience is no small task, and a lot of developers turn to the kitchen for inspiration. The Stamper brothers created Ultimate's addition to this niche sub-genre in the shape of *Cookie*, asking players to bake a cake while dealing with insubordinate ingredients. The wayward produce is knocked into the mixing bowl before having a chance to add your beleaguered baker to the dough; or they fall into the bin of their own accord and go to waste. The visuals prove suitably cartoony and give the abstract concoction a friendly and approachable personality. Reactions were mixed at the time of release, with some reviewers praising the game's unique concept while others found it to be a limited novelty. But also of interest is that *Cookie's* original target audience owned the 16K Spectrum, and was one of only four games that Ultimate released as a ZX Interface II ROM, though for a wallet-thumping £14.95. Outrageous!

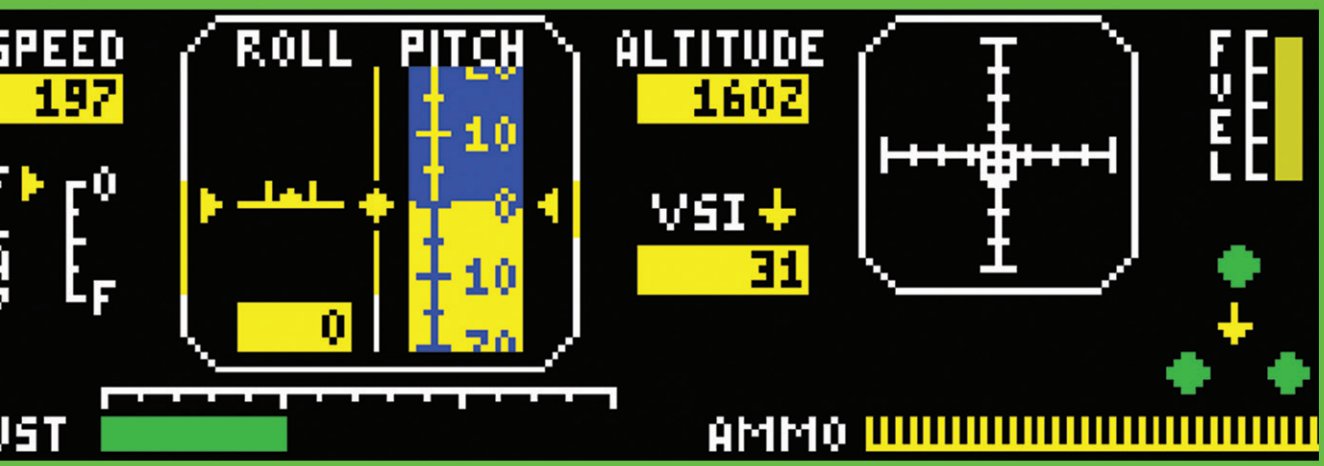
DIGITAL INTEGRATION



Name : Fighter Pilot
Year : 1983
Publisher : Digital Integration
Author : David K. Marshall

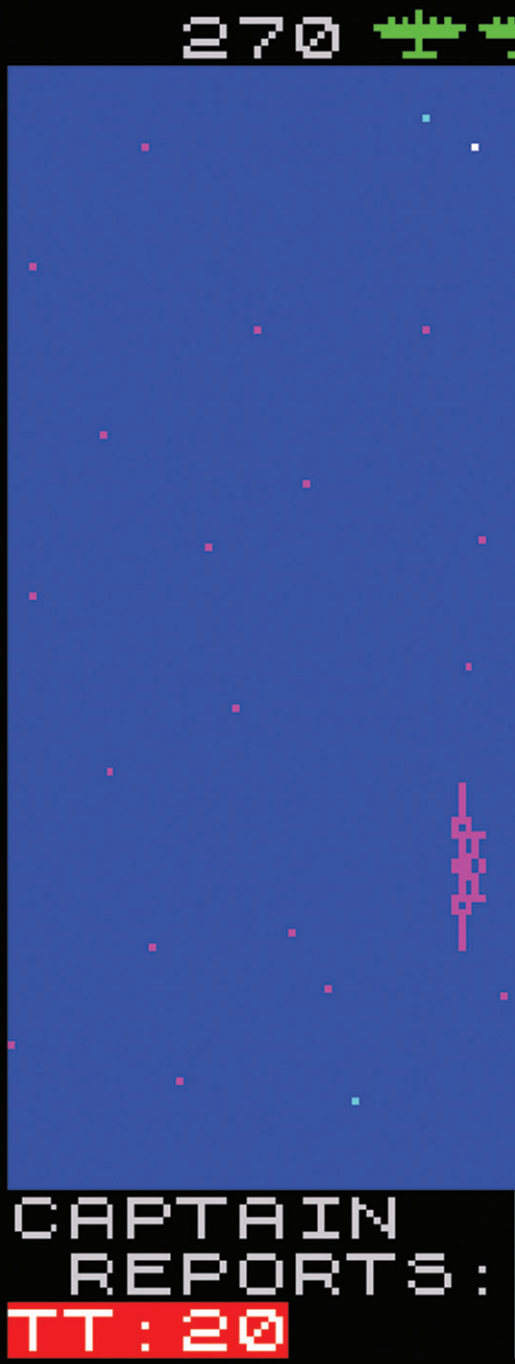


Originating on the ZX81, *Fighter Pilot* was coded by David Marshall, co-founder of Digital Integration along with Rod Swift. Both Marshall and Swift were ex-RAF employees who saw the potential to create accurate and entertaining simulations on home computers. Based upon the popular USAF F15 Eagle jet fighter, the game offers thousands of relative square miles of territory to explore and a complex set of controls to master. Of course, there is plenty of shooting too, but *Fighter Pilot* is also a remarkably in-depth simulation for 1983. The game features several options from the essential landing practice to the thrilling air-to-air combat, and the Eagle is controlled using thrust, elevator, aileron and rudder controls. The graphics are sparse, but the amount of research and computations that lay under its hood is most impressive. The game was also a huge hit, lingering in the software charts for many months after its initial release, although given its only real competition was Psion's *Flight Simulation*, this wasn't a great surprise. However, *Fighter Pilot* is an excellent game in its own right.



DIGITAL INTEGRATION

Name	:	Night Gunner
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Digital Integration
Author	:	Rod J. Swift



Hampshire-based Digital Integration was created in 1982 and soon acquired a considerable reputation based on its excellent flight simulations such as *Fighter Pilot* and *Tomahawk*. Released alongside the former was *Night Gunner* which, as the name suggests, focuses more on shooting than simulation – but is none the worse for it. Coded by Rod Swift, the game was initially released on the ZX81, with predictably rudimentary graphics and gameplay. Come the ZX Spectrum, *Night Gunner* is transformed into a colourful, multi-view shoot-'em up that proved to be consistently popular with critics and gamers alike. The game casts the player in two roles. First they must defend the bomber from enemy aircraft as it travels towards its destination; then your job switches (along with the viewpoint) as the plane reaches its target and the bombs need to be released on the targets below. *Night Gunner* is vastly simpler than complex and massive simulations such as *Fighter Pilot*, but an excellent game in its own right and deservedly scored impressively upon release.

Name	:	Tranz Am
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Ultimate Play The Game
Author	:	Ultimate Play The Game

As developers go, none were as replete with mystique as Ultimate. Questions about the unreleased Sabreman adventure *Mire Mare* prevail to this day and there's uncertainty about the authorship of some of its games too. Who programmed *Pentagram* and *Martianoids* for example? *Tranz Am* also poses problems. We assume it was coded by Chris Stamper, except it's absolutely nothing like any other Ultimate game. Instead, it's a top down scrolling racer with you tearing up a barren wasteland in search of eight coveted trophies. Enemy racers are in pursuit and with no guns you must either lose them or cause them to crash. The game window offers a mere glimpse of a much larger map (covering the USA no less!), and you have to refuel as racing rages on through the night. So who was responsible for this pleasing change of pace? It was most probably John Lathbury, the seldom spoken-about 'third man' at Ultimate, but let's maintain the mystery for now and just play the game instead.

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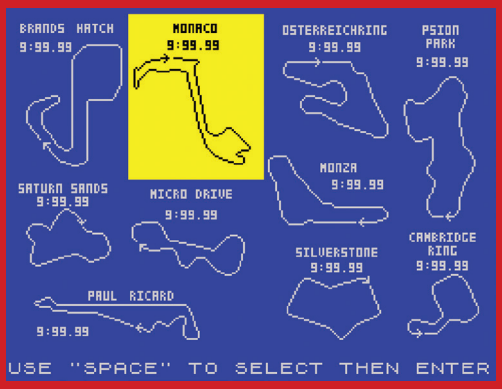
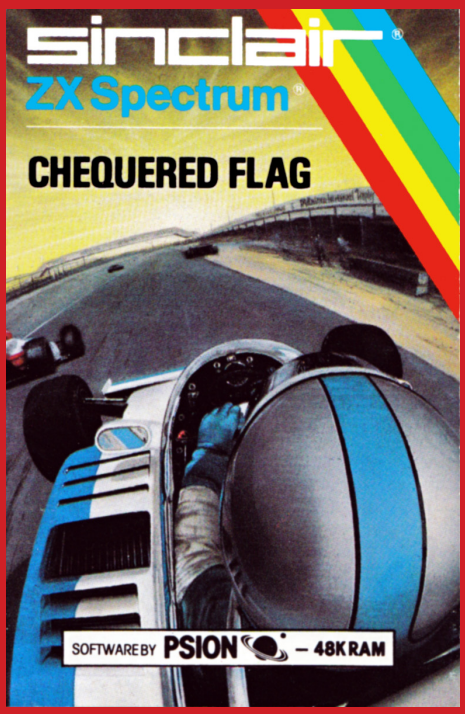
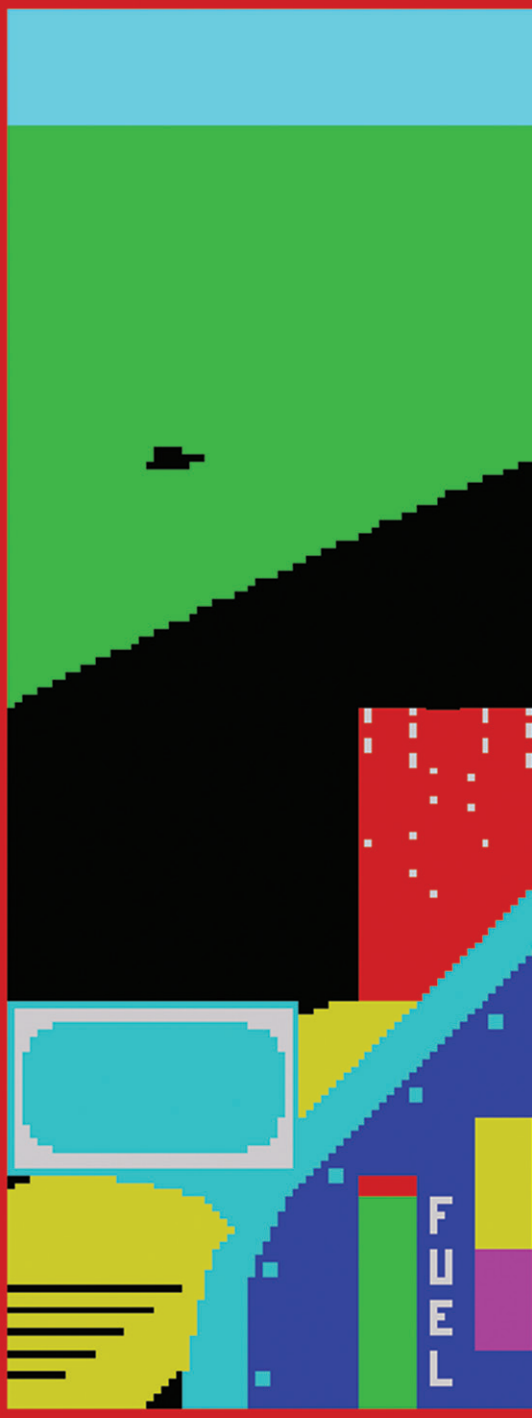
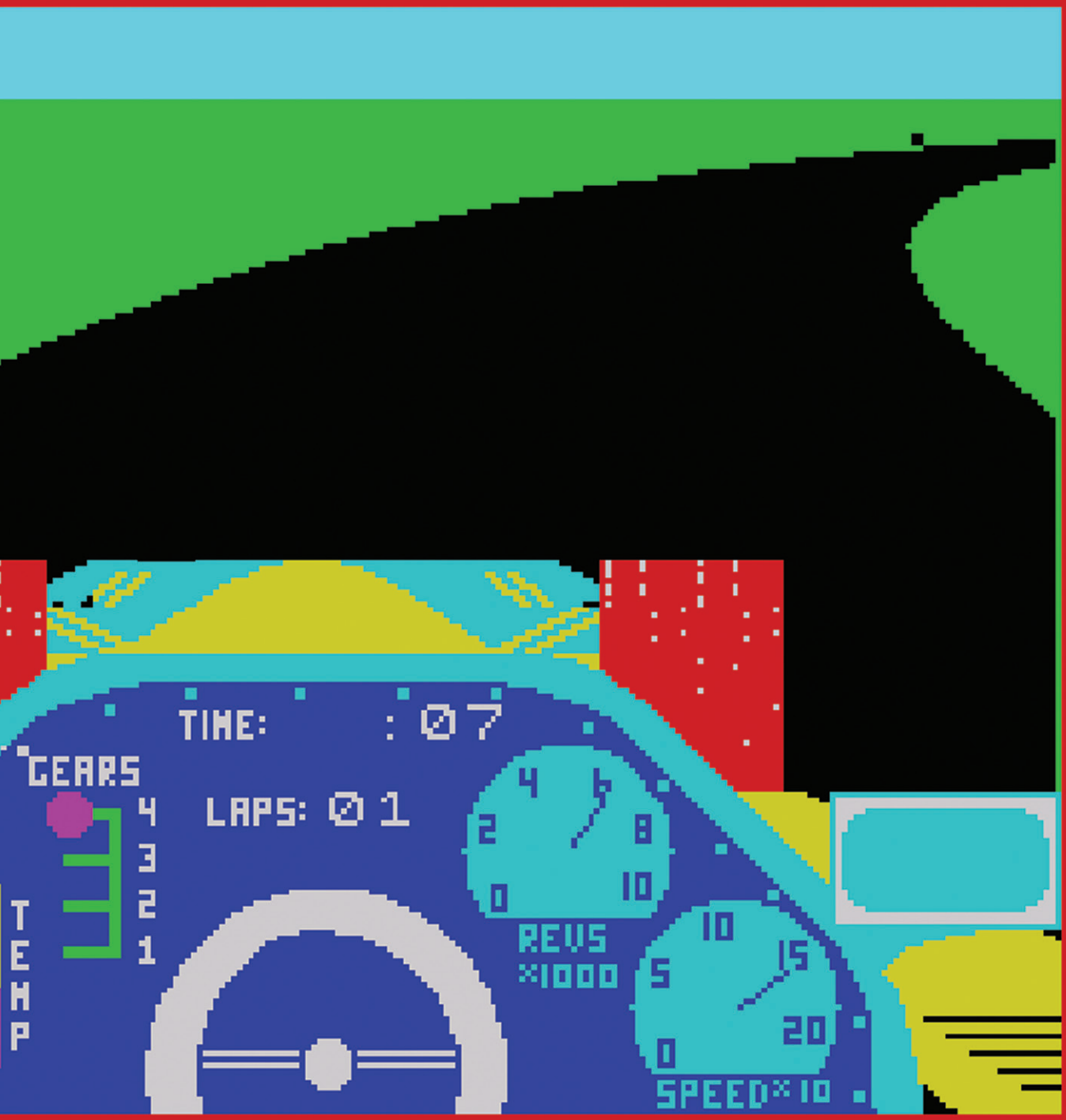


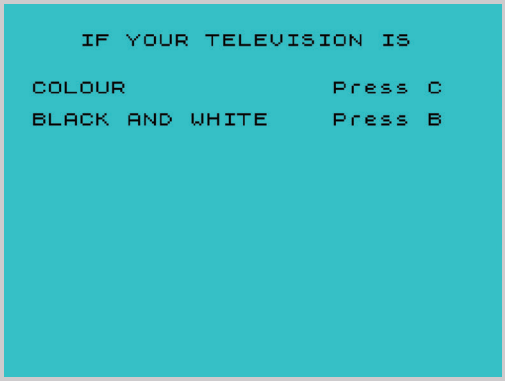
Name : Chequered Flag
Year : 1983
Publisher : Sinclair Research
Author : Steve Kelly



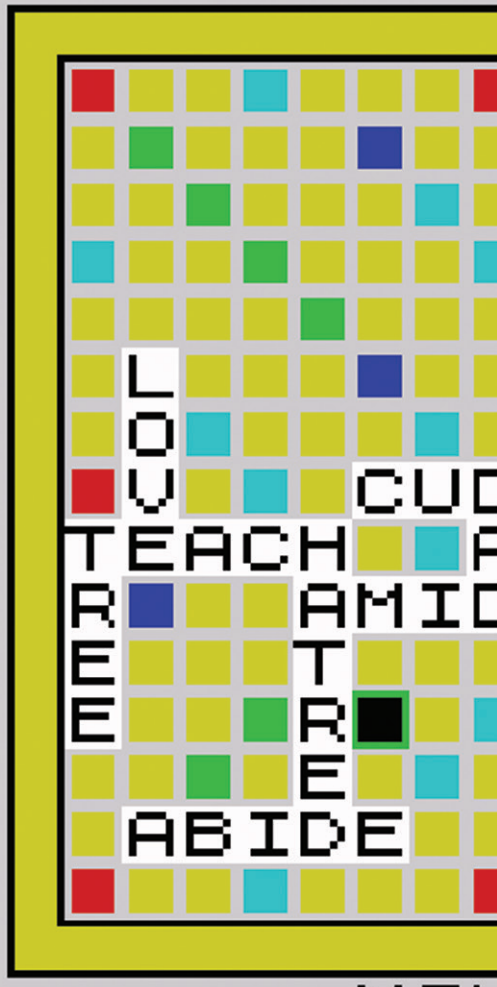


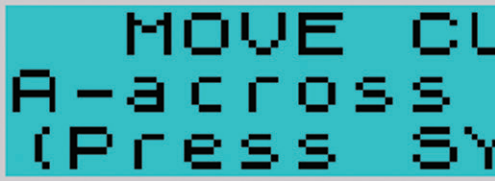
After playing *Pole Position* at the local seaside arcade, the thought of owning a racing arcade cabinet and playing it at home was every youngster's dream. *Chequered Flag* gave each aspiring James Hunt racer an opportunity to realise that dream albeit with an element of squinting and a little sprinkling of imagination dust over the Ferguson TV to help the illusion along. With ten tracks to choose from based on their real world counterparts, a couple of glaring omissions soon spring to light. There are no roadside buildings, trees, bushes, fences, people – or anything really else – to visually spruce up and add a little realism on your travels. Then you notice you are very much alone; it seems like no other budding driver has taken you up on your challenge of the best of three laps. The game leans therefore towards simulator and if played this way does offer a pretty good challenge as oil, glass and other debris have to be avoided all in the name of getting a better time on a favourite track. A shame then that a true racing experience wouldn't hit the bedroom for some years yet.





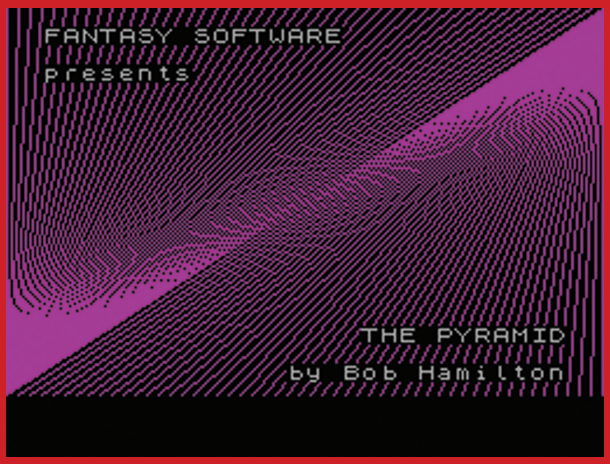
Name	:	Scrabble
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Sinclair Research
Author	:	Steve Kelly

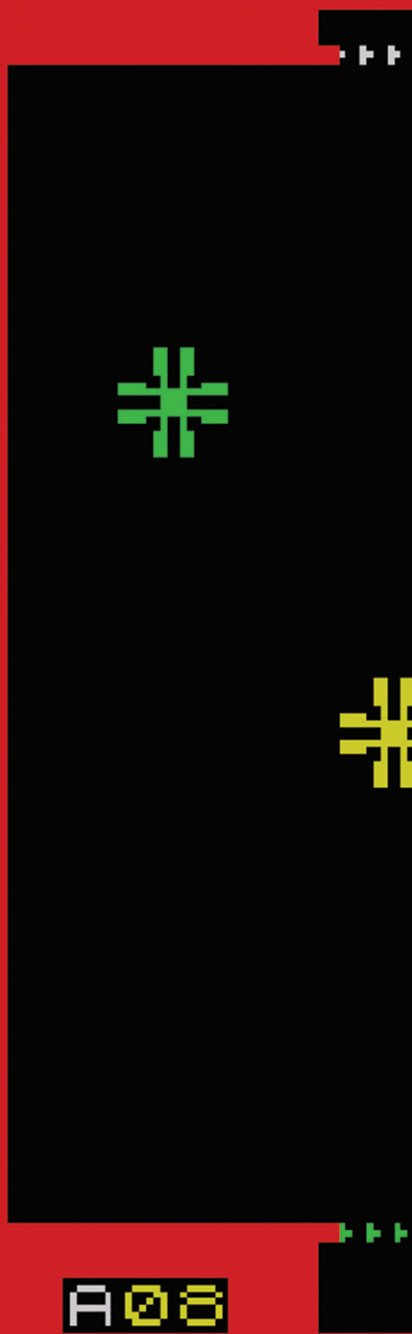




Boasting 11,000 words in its vocabulary and a clean, functional user interface, Psion's officially licensed *Scrabble* is an excellent adaptation of the famous board game and a valuable piece of software in the battle by kids to persuade parents that the Spectrum is for educational purposes after all. The game was released in 1983, but most will remember it as part of a bundle pack with new Spectrums that included those other two ubiquitous games, *Survival* and *Make-A-Chip*. The key part of *Scrabble* is the ability to play against the Spectrum itself, which is no mean opponent. Up to four players can take part and any combination of human and computer players can be used. Should any player put down a word that is not in its sizeable dictionary, the Spectrum 'challenges' the player. This gave the opportunity to cheat, but also to add words to the dictionary, although they were forgotten by the time the game was loaded up again. The dictionary itself is fairly exhaustive but has one infamous omission: CAT.

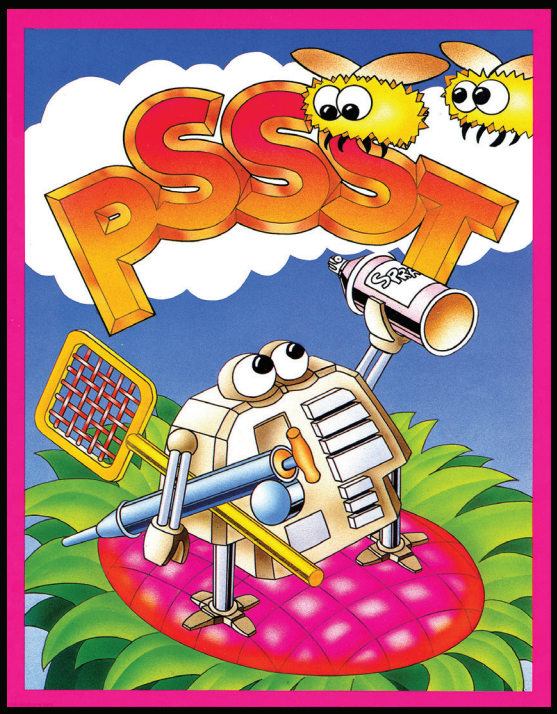
Name : The Pyramid
Year : 1983
Publisher : Fantasy Software
Author : Bob Hamilton, Darren Hamilton, Ian Hamilton

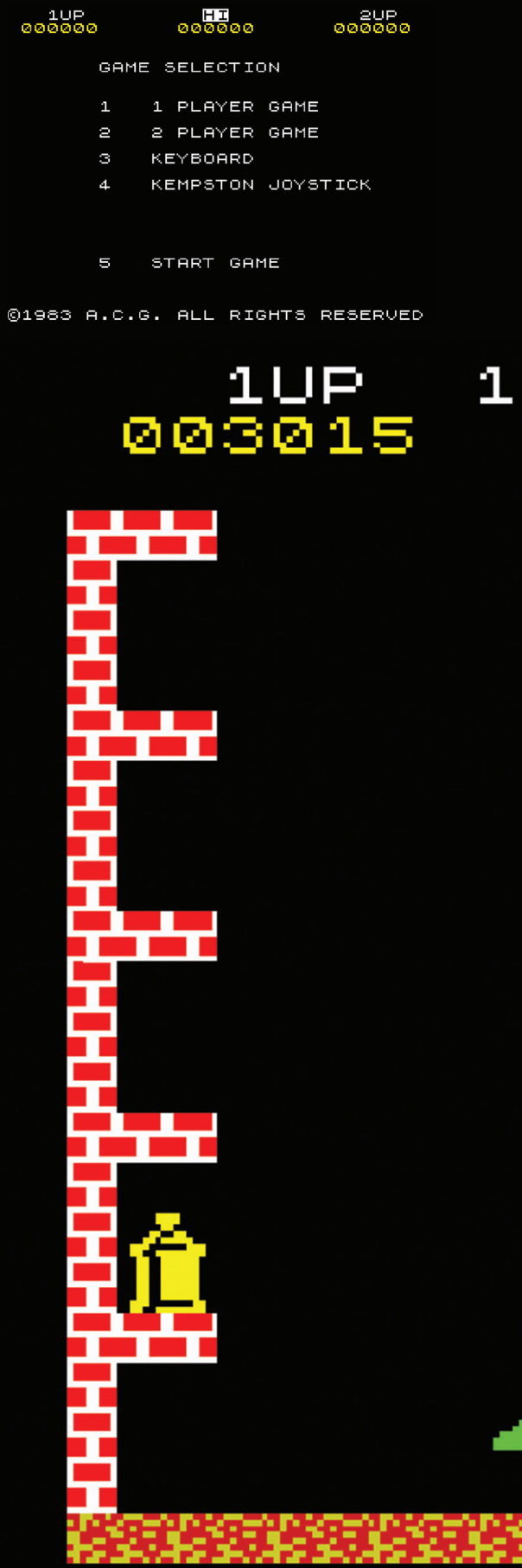




Coded by Bob Hamilton and published by Fantasy (who were one of a legion of publishers who folded in the mid-eighties), *The Pyramid* is one of its more famous games along with *Backpacker's Guide to the Universe*. It's a flick-screen game with the lead character, Ziggy, enclosed within a strange bubble-like craft that continually descends unless its thrusters are activated. In a plot heavily influenced (read: stolen) from *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, Ziggy has reached the titular Pyramid in an effort to discover the answer to Life, Universe and Everything. To do so, he must descend through the structure zapping the 60 different types of enemy and collecting the crystals that enable him to break the doors to the level below. Most screens had two exits, thus creating different paths through the Pyramid, although in effect all of the game's screens were identical save the differing types of enemy. *The Pyramid* bolts a crazy plot onto a *Jetpac*-lite shooting game, the result of which is a fun, if limited, arcade game that can still entertain today.

Name	:	Pssst
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Ultimate Play The Game
Author	:	Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper





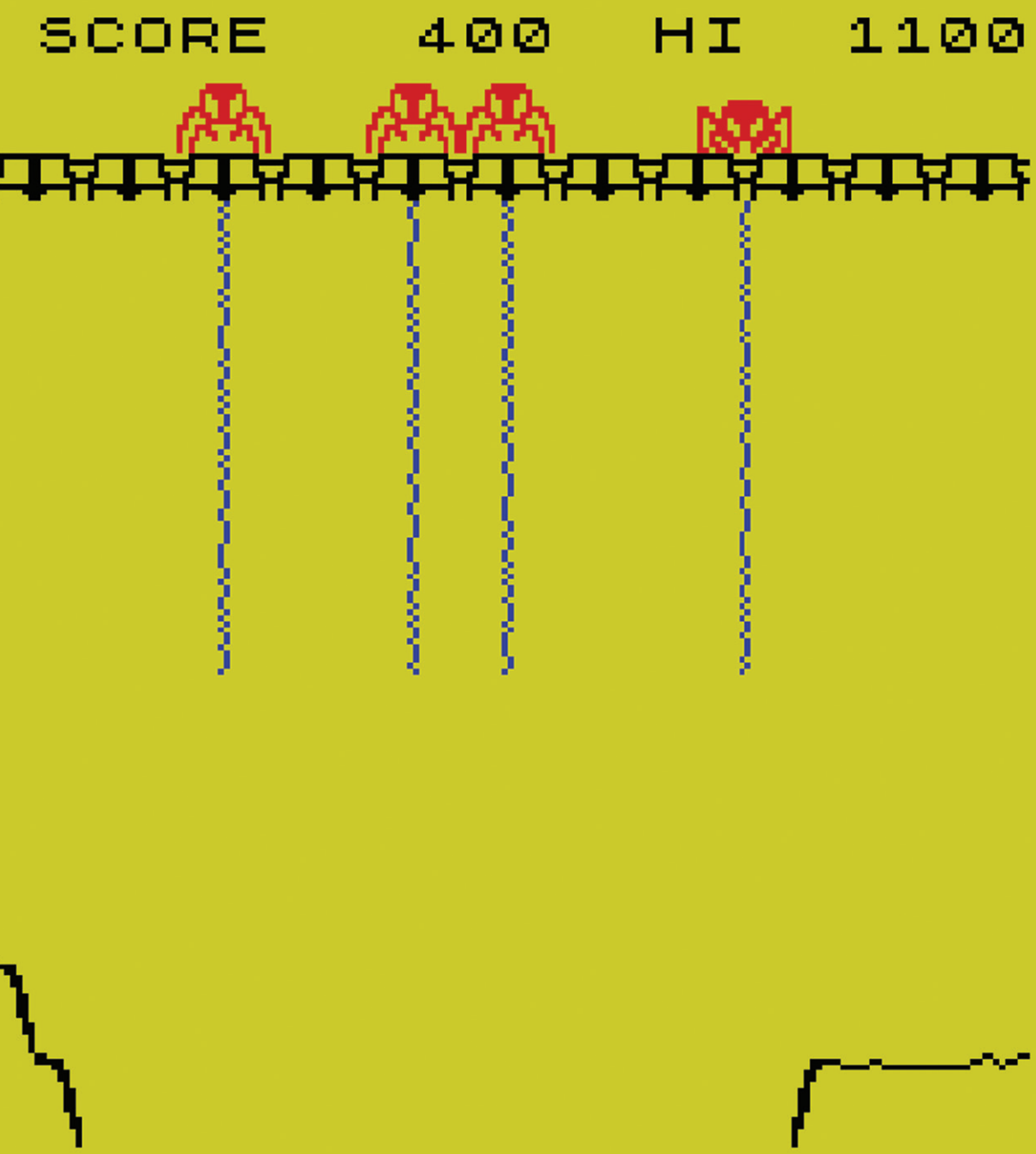
Back when the Cold War was something the older boys used to talk about to make us young kids cry, Percy Thrower used to get his fingers green in the Blue Peter garden. Young teenage boys around the UK loaded up *Pssst* on their Spectrums in an attempt to apply the tricks learnt from their gardening guru. A simple premise (they always are), the challenge is to keep the bugs away from the budding plant on screen for long enough, allowing it to blossom into a striking sunflower. The action gets hectic pretty soon as all manner of flying insects and creepy crawlies are looking for a midday snack and home in on the green, lush shoots sprouting from the soil. It takes a quick spray of the colour-coded insecticide can to see the bugs puff into smithereens only to be replaced by more and more. It's enormously satisfying seeing your young plant bloom into its prime in animated pixel splendour. Percy Thrower eat your heart out!

sinclair

Name	:	Horace & The Spiders
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Sinclair Research
Author	:	William Tang

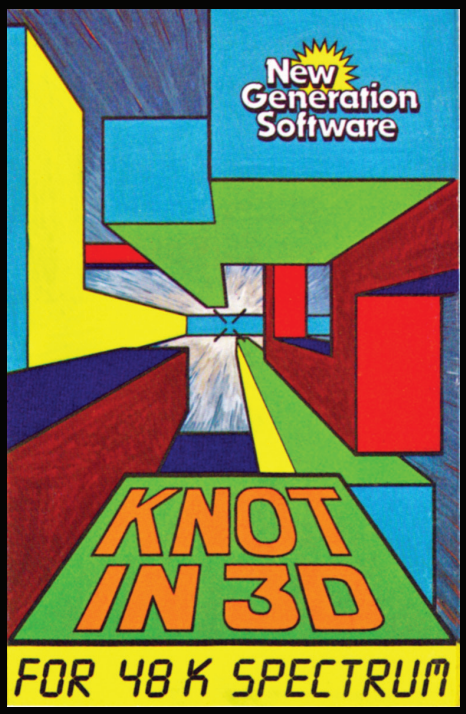
SERUM 4

Horace can be likened to Bear Grylls – a slightly mad individual who continually, for no rational reason, puts 'himself' into positions of peril without a thought to the consequential danger. If Horace is not crossing busy roads and skiing 100mph down vertical ski slopes without fear, he is exploring caves full of terrifying spiders, swinging over large canyons and killing eight legged creatures by first trapping them and then squishing them into an early death. In this game, things never really get much more complicated (or exciting) than that. Lives are lost through contact with spiders or falling to a grisly canyon death – finish the four stages though and an extra serum (life) is awarded to Horace for his continuous, entertaining bravery. Nostalgia often blurs the gaming memory and the 'classic' mantle is often handed out to old games without merit – unfortunately the Horace trilogy of games falls into this category with the replay value all these years later being, at best brief. For Horace's next adventure, maybe he should try fishing for white sharks or volcano hopping.

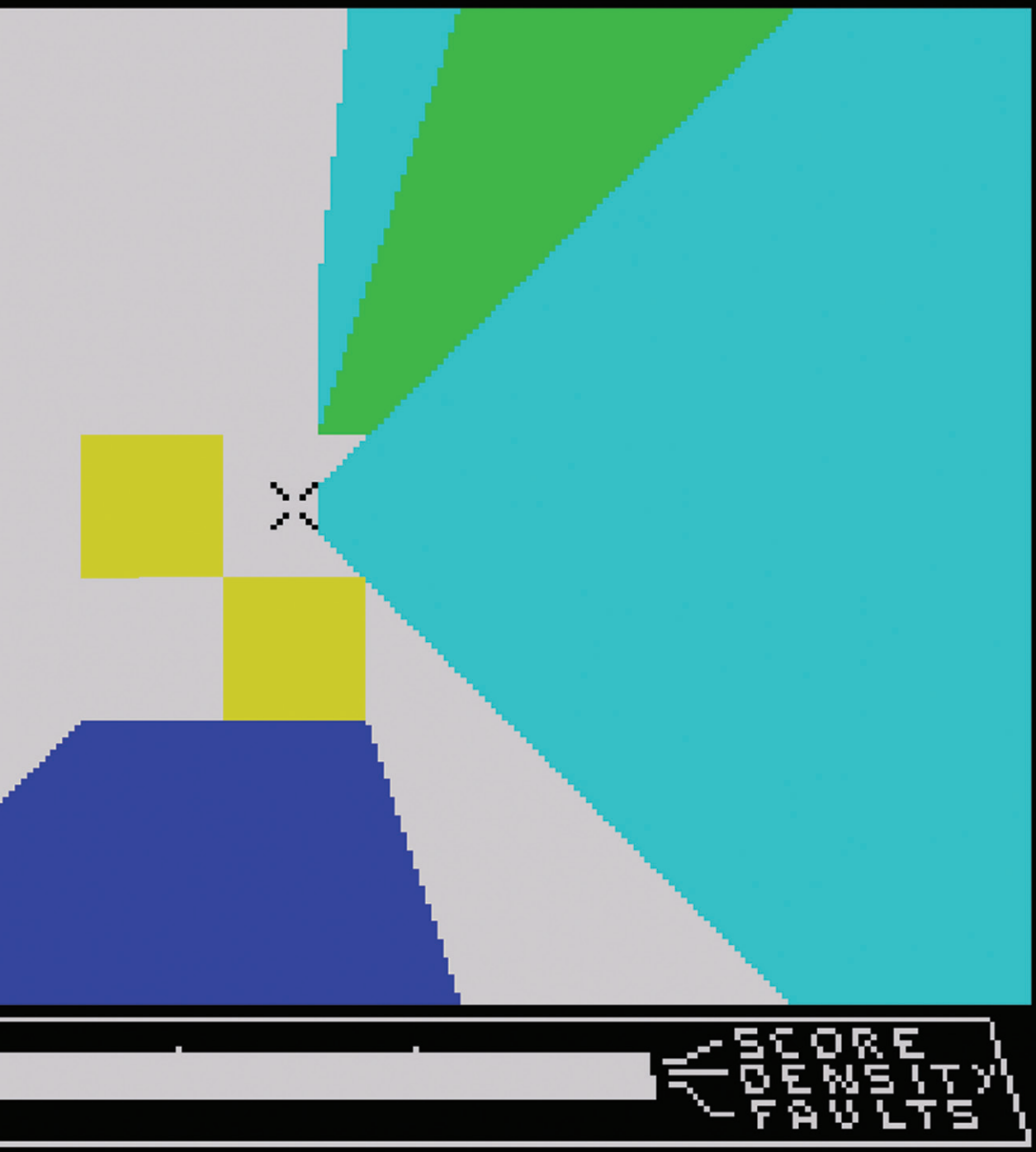


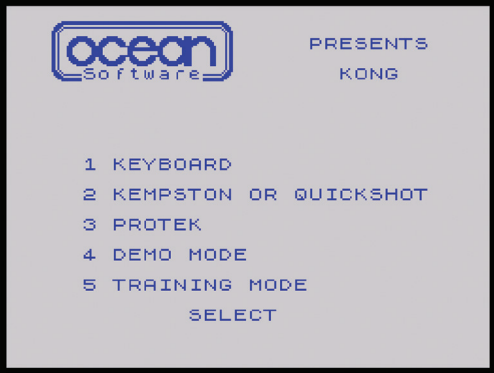
New Generation Software

Name	:	Knot in 3D
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	New Generation Software
Author	:	Malcolm E. Evans

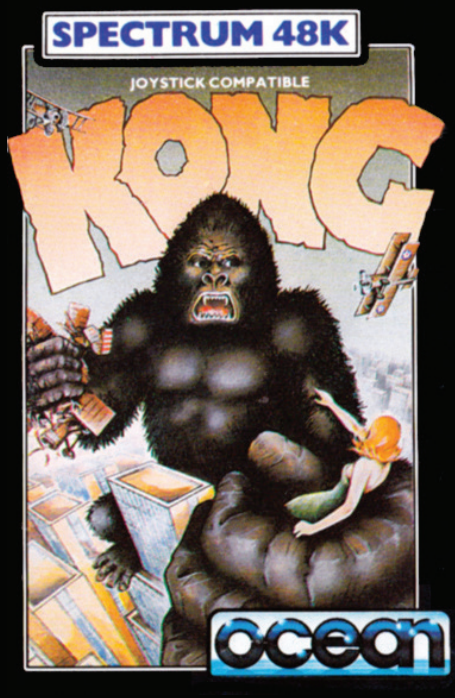


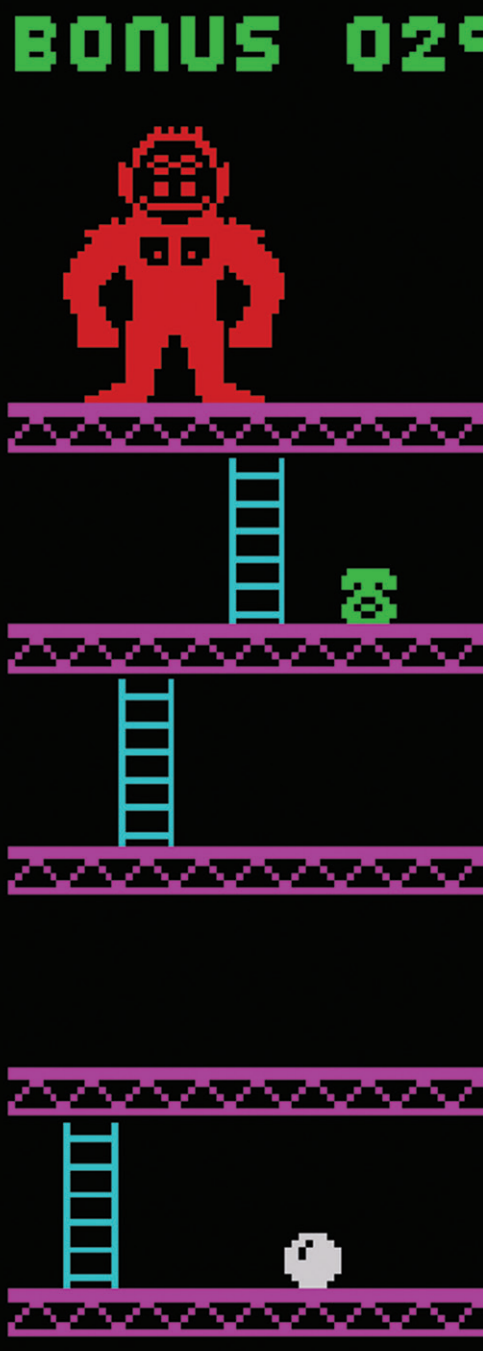
Many remember the ZX81 classic *3D Monster Maze* from Malcolm Evans. A similar number surely wonders why he never brought the game to the Spectrum with bigger mazes and deadlier dinos. But then Evans was off doing something quite different with 3D. If *3D Monster Maze* was a fun illusion (hence the appearance of the showman at the beginning) then *Knot in 3D* was a proper spectacle; a real 'wow' moment early in the Spectrum's life. Best described as the Tron *Light Cycles* game in 3D, you had to avoid the coloured trails left by AI competitors as well as your own. Its thrills certainly weren't immediate – on the first few plays it felt like you'd stepped into a piece of abstract art. But as the trails lengthened and criss-crossed a hellish maze – the knot of the title – soon formed and you needed super-fast reflexes to survive it. The game was bizarre, highly original and weirdly beautiful. *Knot in 3D*? On the contrary, Mr Evans.





Name	:	Kong
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Paul Owens





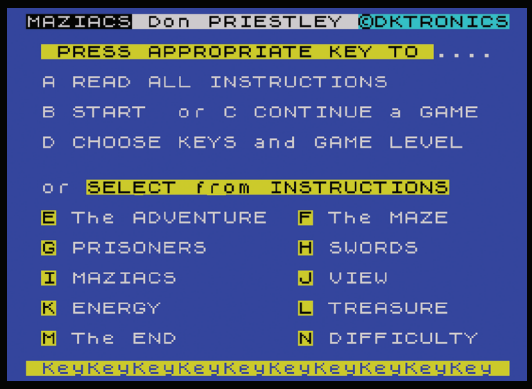
Mario started on his quest to stardom in the arcades some time ago by jumping over barrels and climbing ladders to rescue the damsel in distress from the killer gorilla. The Spectrum inspired version of *Donkey Kong* is faithful to the original and is an early Ocean title written by Paul Owens, who went on to write *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. By Paul's own admission, he was not too good with graphics so Kong himself looks rather like a malnourished Neanderthal man in need of a good feed whilst Mario's alter ego runs with the enigmatic style of an antelope being chased by a lion. The gameplay is addictive but unforgiving as you traverse through four different stages looking to save your loved one and destroy Kong as barrels of oil and fireballs are sent your way. When you do get to meet the hairy one after collecting random littered tat bought whilst on holiday abroad on the last stage, the rather glowing sunburnt animal falls, literally flashing, to his death. Then would you believe, one of Kong's brethren has nicked your girl and it's back to stage 1 and the start of another rescue mission.

Name	:	Lunar Jetman
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Ultimate Play The Game
Author	:	Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

And so the march of Ultimate Play the Game continued with a successor to its 16K *Jetpac* title for the larger 48K machine. A base on a lunar landscape has a missile pointing at you with your name on it – once the timer gets to zero the missile is launched and it's up to you to shoot it down before it destroys your buggy. To alleviate the stress of such an attack, the tactical solution of destroy before being destroyed could and should be adopted. Thankfully someone evil has been forgetful and left a bomb lying around that can be collected and transported via your lunar buggy to the nasty launch pad and used to destroy the base (hurrah!). And that's it – once one base is destroyed another one pops up and another bomb is carelessly lost to be collected and a high score is there to be taken. *Lunar Jetman* is another highly polished, iconic title from the early Ultimate assembly line that deserves a spot in every Spectrum fan's top 20.

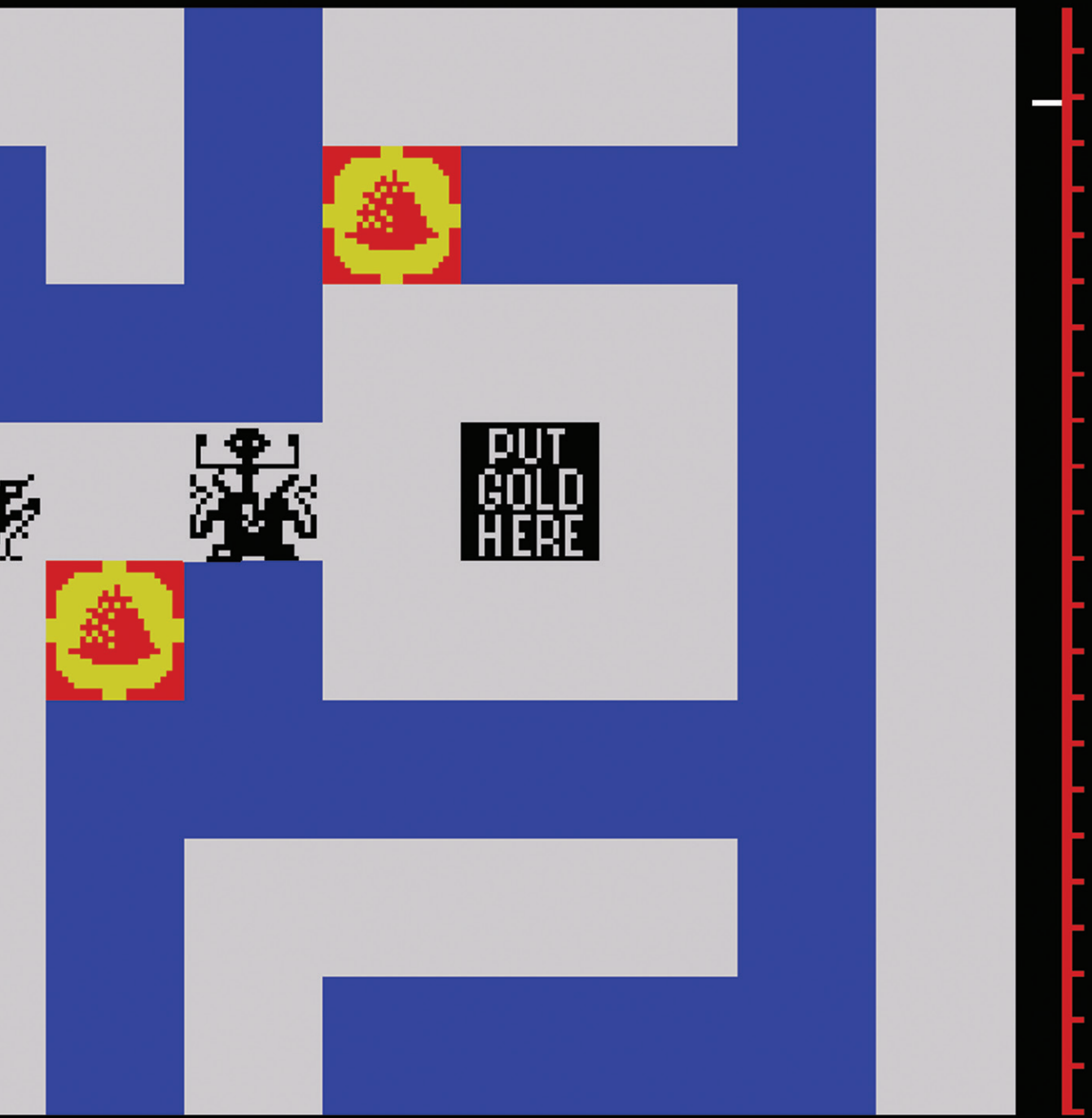
dk'tronics

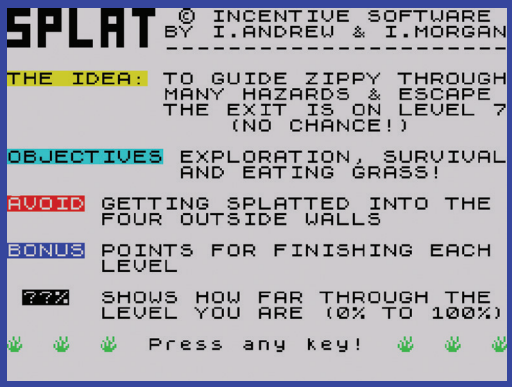
Name	:	Maziacs
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	DK'Tronics
Author	:	Don Priestley



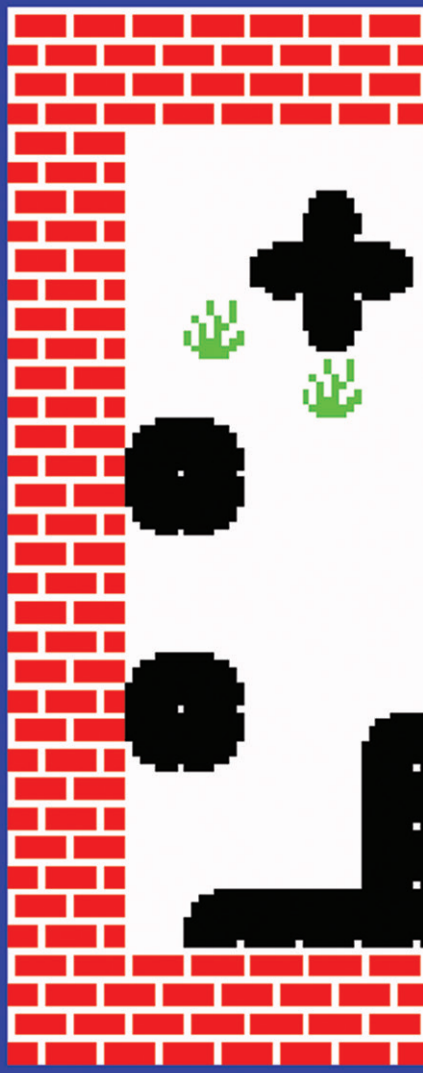
dk'tronics
Software
COPYRIGHT
Maziacs
Don PRIESTLEY 1983

Add a little colour, some nicer graphics and a little beeptastic sound to the ZX81 game *Mazogs* and voila, *Maziacs* is what you get. As the intrepid treasure hunter, the challenge is to find the hidden box of gems in a maze guarded by bloodthirsty Mazogs – ferocious creatures that, if you get too close, grab you in their massive jaws and crunch the life out of your pixelated bones. Finding a sword helps – at least allowing the slaying of just one of the monsters before a new sword has to be found in the randomly created maze. The length of the journey ahead is unknown so it is wise to stock up with grub along the way to keep the energy levels up, and to take heed of clues given to you by chained up prisoners that are casually bumped into during the exploration. *Maziacs* is easily one of the best early maze games and was written by Don Priestley who went on to to create *The Trap Door* and *Popeye*.





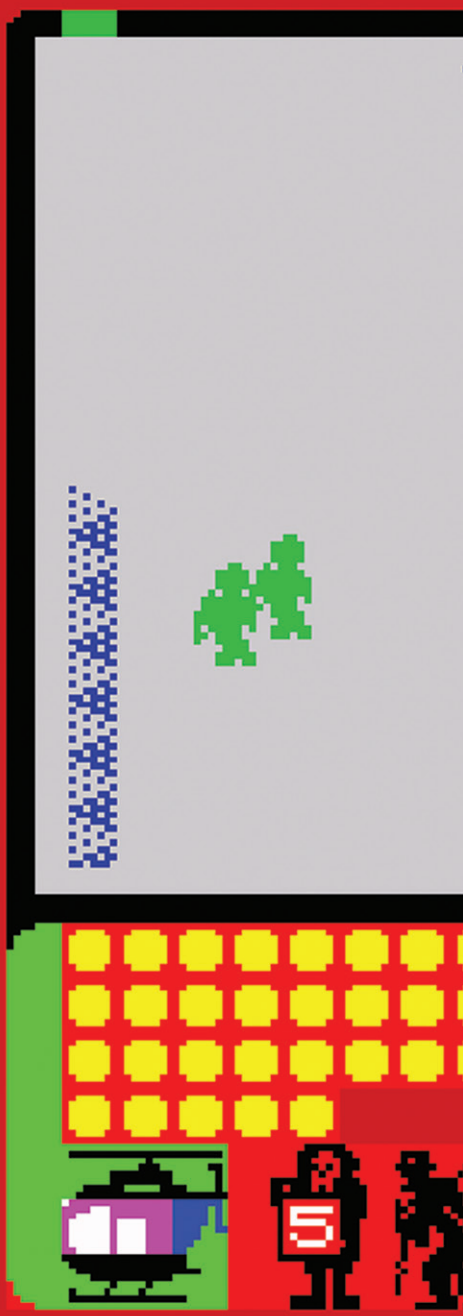
Name	:	Splat!
Year	:	1983
Publisher	:	Incentive Software
Author	:	Ian Andrew, Ian Morgan



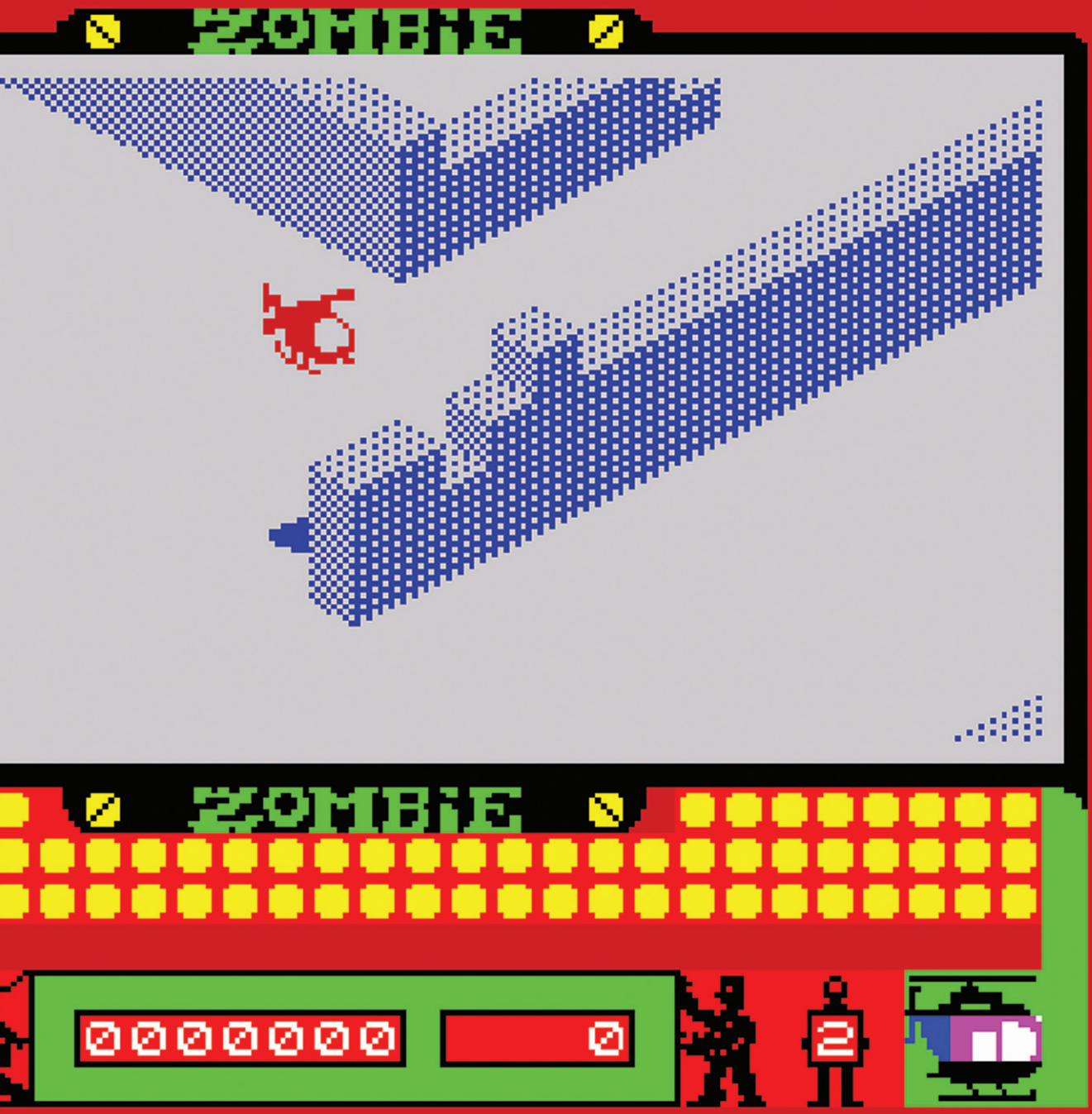
Splat! was the first game from Incentive Software, the publisher formed by Ian Andrew in 1983. Already convinced the software industry was going to be massive thanks to his own debut coding effort, *Mined-Out*, Andrew began the company with the aim of releasing his own games and recouping the rewards himself. It didn't quite turn out that way as *Splat!* was to be his final attempt at coding with the daily tasks of running a rapidly-expanding company proving a significant barrier to his programming aspirations. The concept to the game is remarkably simple: playing a strange cross-shaped character named Ziggy, the player's task is merely to navigate their way out of each maze. Sounds easy, right? Actually not, because *Splat!'s* maze randomly scrolls in all directions and should Ziggy find himself trapped as the screen moves towards him, a messy demise is inevitable. *Splat!* is a fast-paced and wonderfully judged arcade game that even today is an original and engaging experience. With additional coding assistance from Ian Morgan and a high-score competition that boasted a top prize of £500, the game became a big hit for Incentive and paved the way for its illustrious future releases.

QUICKSILVA

Name	:	Zombie Zombie
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Quicksilva
Author	:	Sandy White, Angela Sutherland



Ant Attack saw the first viewing of a graphics engine developed by Sandy White and Angela Sutherland called Soft Solid which impressed gamers and critics in equal measures. The game itself, when the graphical scenery is removed, proved basic, repetitive and a nightmare to control – yet it sold in bucket loads. *Zombie Zombie* uses the same engine to create a familiar looking abandoned city full of the undead that must be expunged of by the male/female hero. The engine once again impresses; now allowing blocks to be added to, and removed from existing structures and city walls, *Minecraft* style. The aim of the game is to locate the zombies one by one by flying around the city in a little red helicopter – once a green, pixelated blighter is spotted, the 'copter can be landed and the zombie's attention raised by shouting 'chase me' in a loud attention-grabbing voice. The zombie then follows you as you lure 'it' up one of your high-rise ready made constructions – you jump off, the zombie follows and falls to their gooey green death. If only this worked for the characters in 'The Walking Dead'.

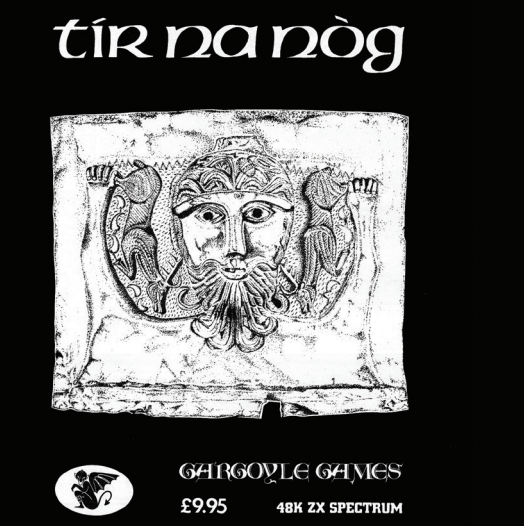


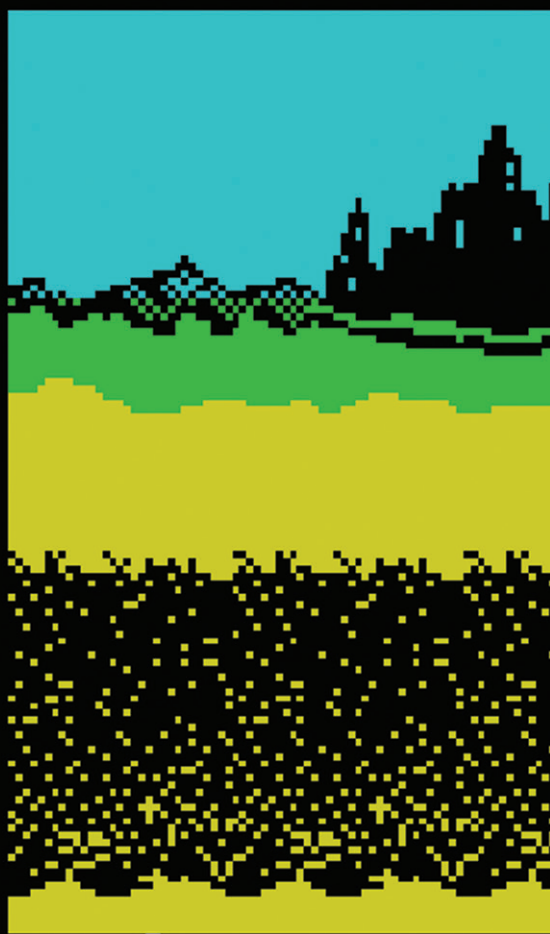
options

1. enter tir na nog
2. save game
3. restore game

GARGOYLE GAMES

Name	:	Tir Na Nog
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Gargoyle Games
Author	:	Greg Follis, Roy Carter



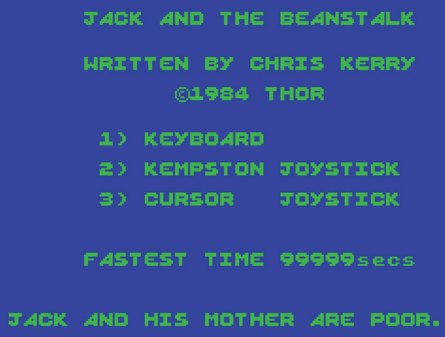


There are not many games on the Spectrum where the hero of the game is 56 pixels high and utilizes 64 different frames of animation. Take a play of *Tir Na Nog* and you will be introduced to the hero who goes by the name of 'Cuchulainn' – he is an absolute graphical wonder on the 8-bit machine and explores a magical land of Celtic mythology in search of the fragments of the Seal of Calum. The game has some splendid parallax scrolling and animated backgrounds that help to immerse the player in a strange and beautiful land filled with characters, the names of which can only be pronounced after a bevy of alcohol. Some of those bumped into are helpful and give you a little advice to help you on your quest – others are just a hindrance. Be warned – the land is full of cryptic puzzles that need an abstract thought process to be engaged to have any chance of them being solved. *Tir Na Nog's* sequel is *Dun Darach*.

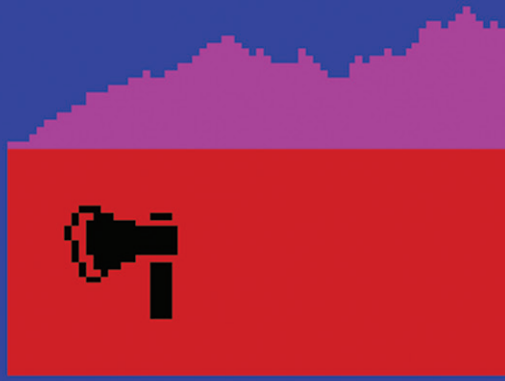
NAME : Doomdark's Revenge
YEAR : 1984
COMPANY : Beyond Software
AUTHOR : Mike Singleton

Mike Singleton kept the storyline flowing with the follow up to *The Lords of Midnight* with this masterpiece. In an atrocious act of retaliation for her father's death, Shareth the Heartstealer has kidnapped your son Morkin and taken him north through the Gate of Varenorm. In this epic quest it is up to you and your merry band of war ravaged men to go forth and defeat Shareth, thus releasing the imprisoned Morkin. *Doomdark's* expanded dramatically from its predecessor, using the full potential of the landscaping technique – there are tunnels, palaces, a myriad of characters to bump into, a much larger map to explore and the dreaded rolling fog of war. Gameplay is made tougher with alliances harder to forge and easier to break than its predecessor and the random movement of characters with Shareth hunting you down throughout the game. *Doomdark's Revenge* is another absorbing tale from the late father of adventure, Mike Singleton.

Andy Wareing



Name	:	Jack and the Beanstalk
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Thor
Author	:	Chris Kerry, Steve Kerry

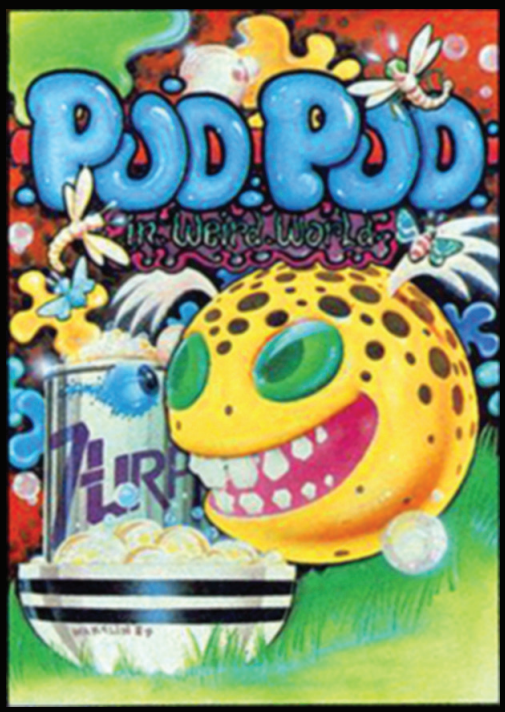


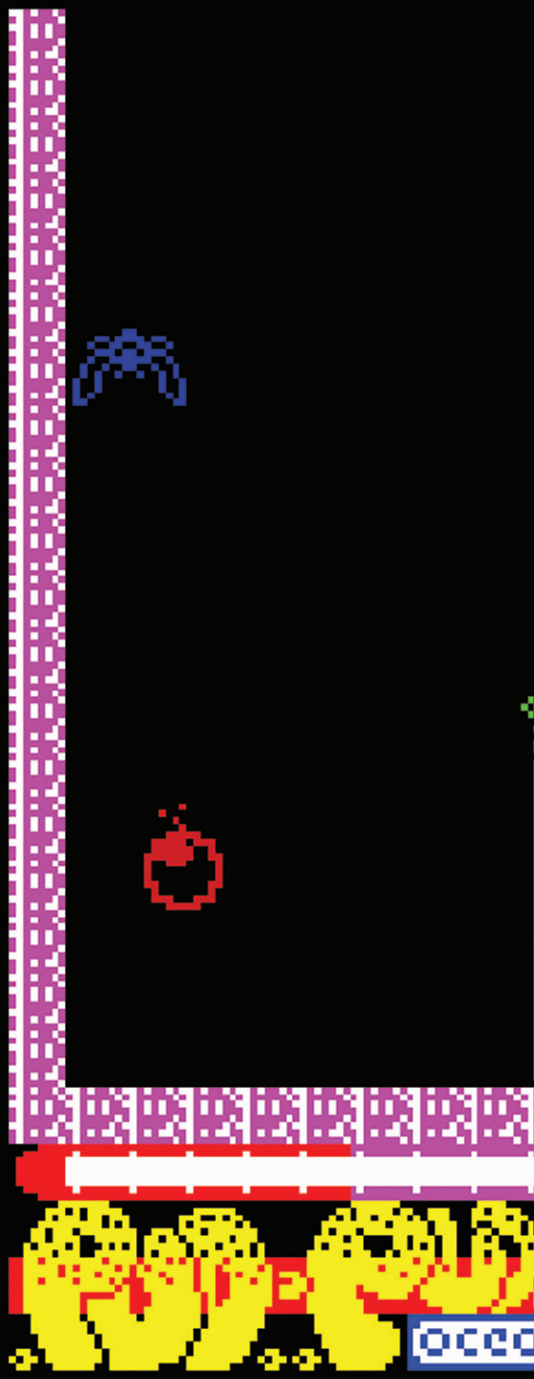
Many games celebrated on these pages are remembered for the right reasons – gameplay, graphics, packaging, music and sound for example. Well *Jack and the Beanstalk* will be remembered for being the most frustrating game in 8-bit gaming history – primarily due to death by wrong pixel. Playing as Jack, there are a number of screens to navigate on your journey to locate the giant, wake him up then ultimately make him fall to his death after chopping down the beanstalk. The challenge the player has is to find a pixel perfect path through the colourful four stages (five if you call coming back down the beanstalk a stage) to complete the quest. This sounds, and indeed should be relatively straightforward – but alas Jack finds himself dying again and again Groundhog Day-style until, with a little bit of luck, repetition and joystick skill the giant is killed. Then it's back…oh actually it's 'Well done and Game Over' and back to the start menu you go. There are a couple of follow up titles to Jack's adventure before Thor became Odin and games remembered for the right reason were developed.

USE S TO PAUSE AND RESTART

PUD PUD COPYRIGHT 1984 OSL

Name	:	Pud Pud
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Jonathan M. Smith, Christine Smith





Pud Pud is the debut release from famed and missed Spectrum wizard Jonathan Smith. The overall aim of this early Ocean game is simple – collect 10 puddings dotted around a bizarre landscape that features crazy colourful creatures in the form of gnats, skulls, worms, dodos, flies and even baby Pud Puds. *Pud Pud* tends to get tired very quickly, bless him, so his energy levels must be kept up by eating the 'good' creatures of the land and avoiding the nasty tasting 'bad' ones – it does take a little time to work out which ones are which. Mr Pud must though, at all costs, avoid eating his rather attractive wife (she has a lovely smile!) – eating her results in instant death. Cleverly, the background graphics change colour and definition each time a screen is revisited to add to the psychedelic theme and combined with a headache inducing tune and sound effects that squelch and squish, the medicine cabinet is soon raided for migraine relief.

CDS Micro Systems

CONTROL OPTIONS

1 KEYBOARD

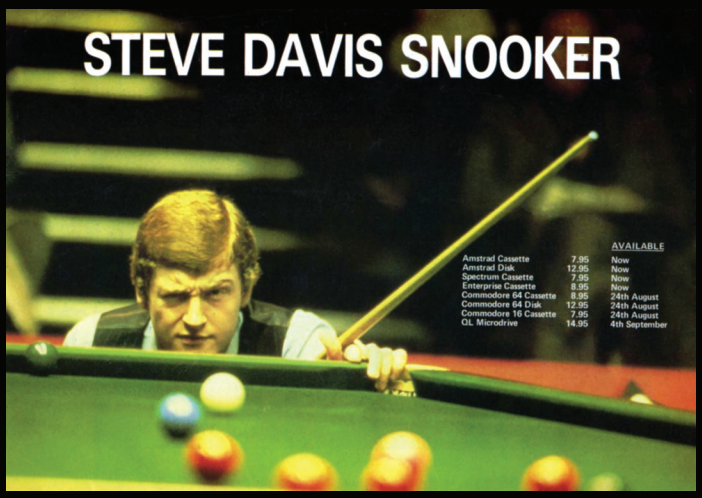
2 KEMPSTON

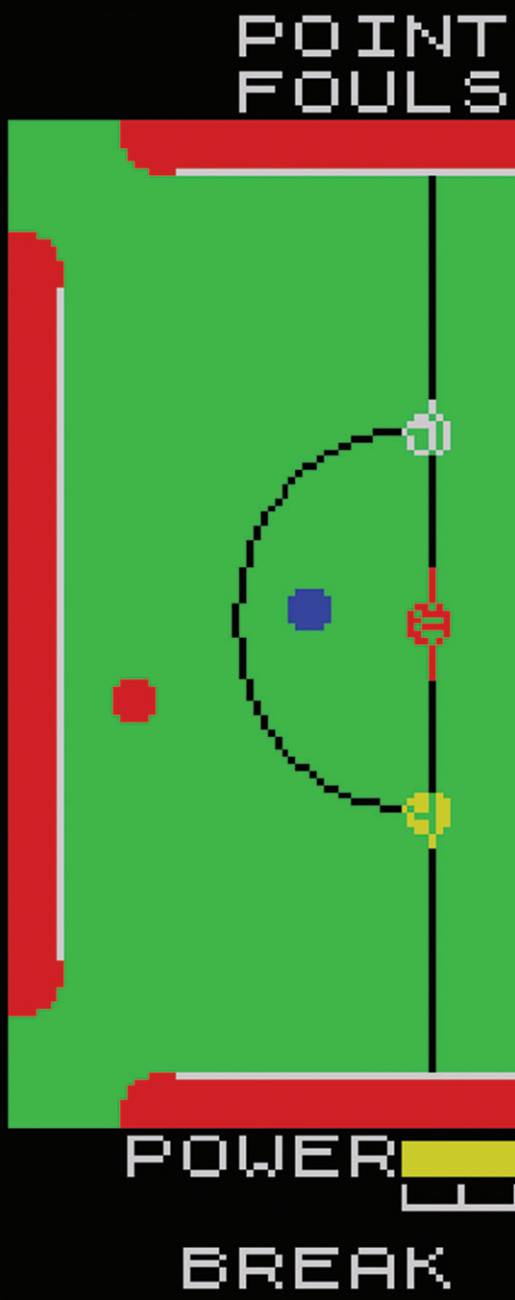
3 CURSOR KEYS

4 INTERFACE 2

PRESS 5 TO CONTINUE.

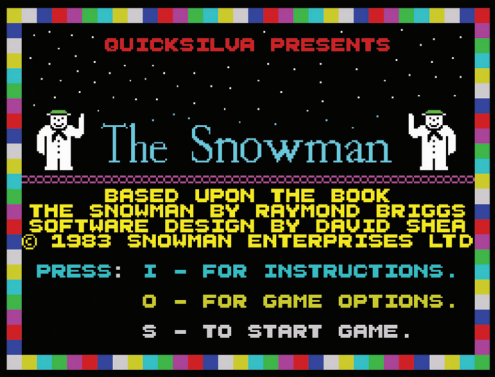
Name	:	Steve Davis Snooker
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	CDS Micro Systems
Author	:	Mike Lamb



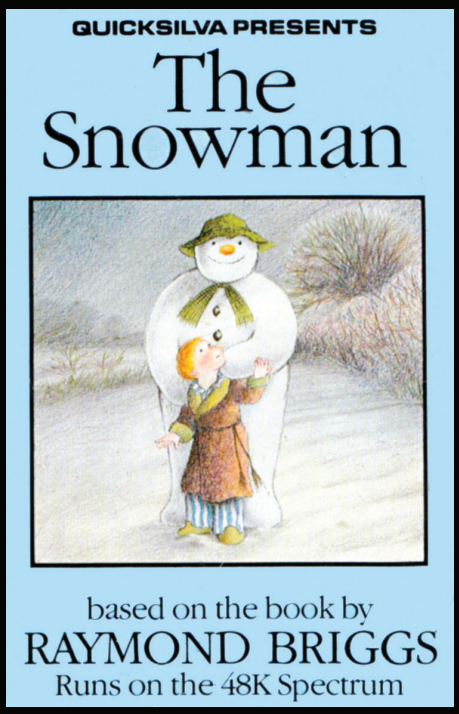


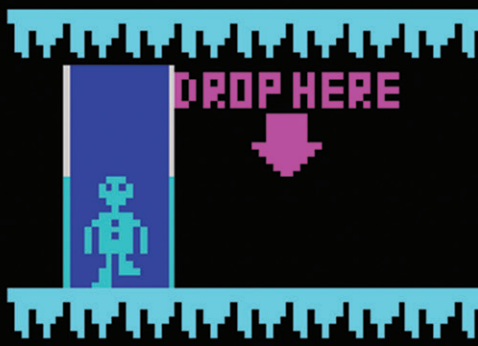
With the limited palette of the Spectrum, depicting the green ball on a green table was always going to be a challenge. Green on the 48K machine is just that, green. To overcome this problem Mike Lamb ingeniously (!) came up with the idea of the green ball being a white circle – it works. The actual game of snooker, with balls bouncing off cushions and each other, is represented really well and once the mechanics of the game are mastered nice breaks can be achieved. With Kirk Stevens and Hurricane Higgins regularly hogging one of the three channels of the family TV in the 80s, budding snooker players could, to a degree, hone their cueing skills in their bedroom and look to replicate the skill of their sporting heroes. Screwing the white back to bounce off the top cushion to get position to pot the pink are all actions that are possible in S*teve Davis Snooker* – just like in the real game – a 147 break though at the time of writing, still eludes this budding gamer.

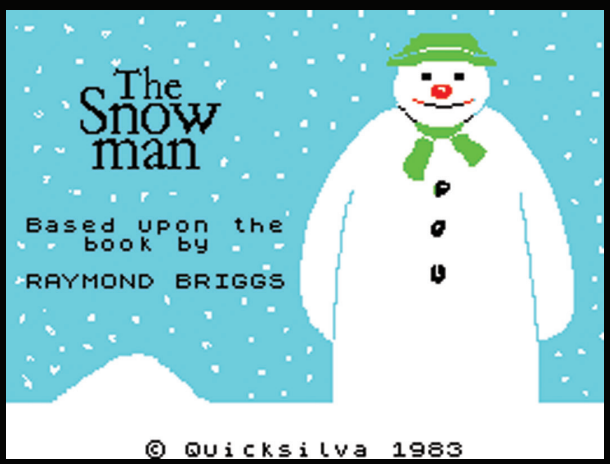
QUICKSILVA



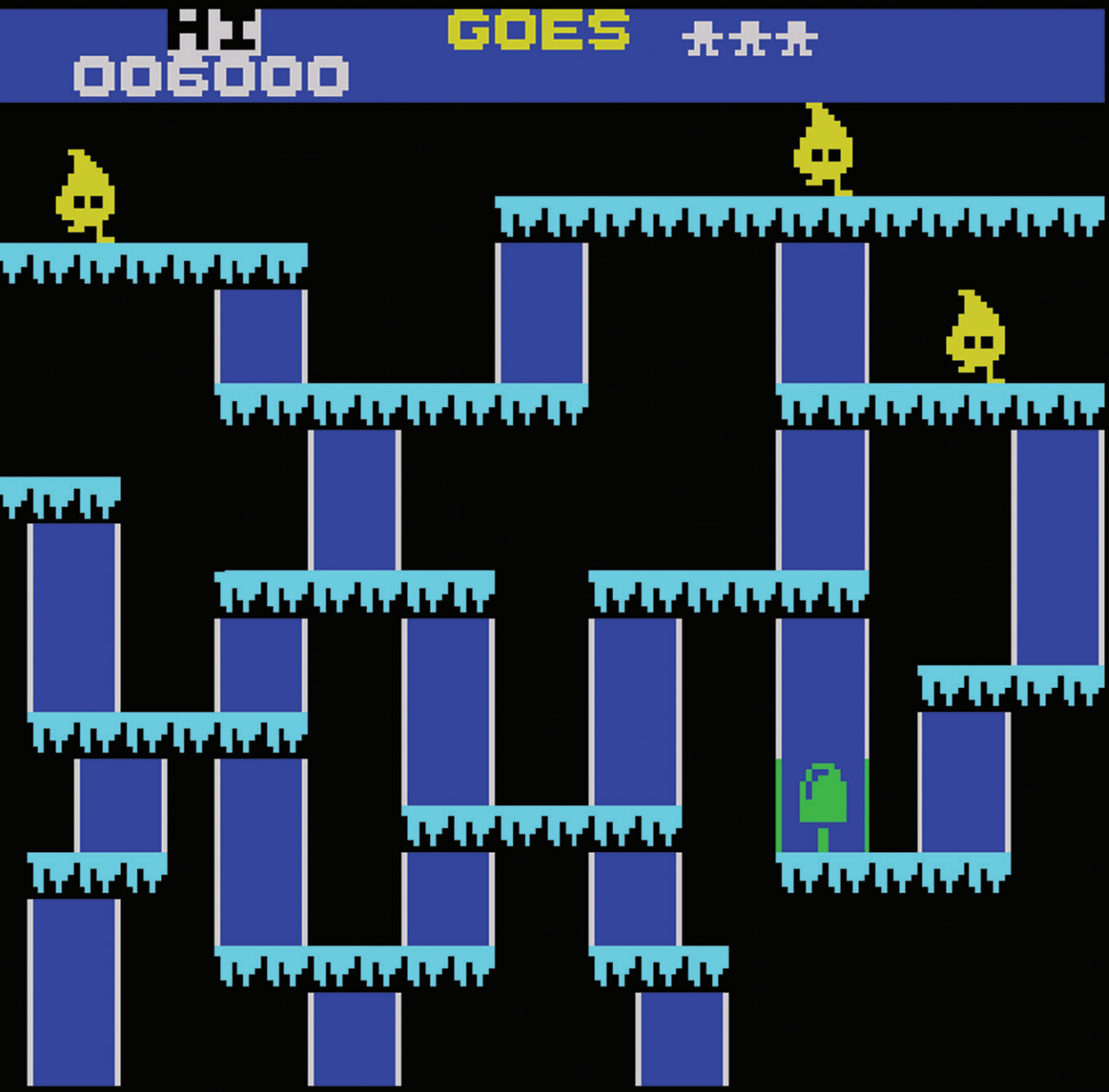
Name	:	The Snowman
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Quicksilva
Author	:	David Shea



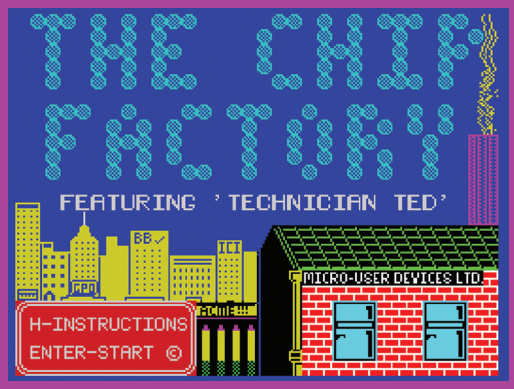




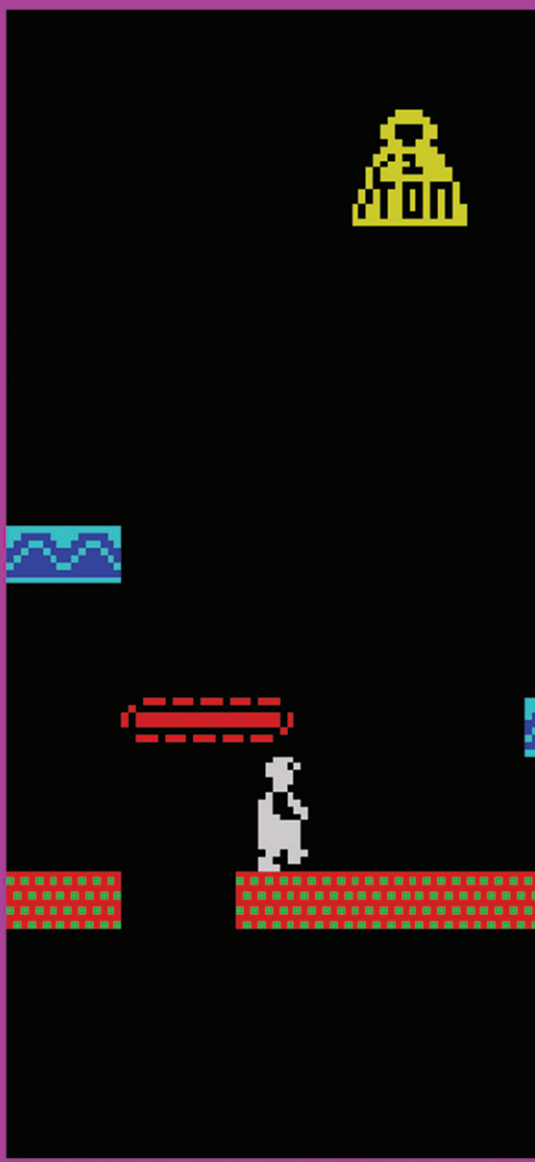
The Snowman joined our small but growing games collection early in 1984 and gave the Christmas loving gamer everything from a magical loading screen to the promise of building your very own 'Frosty The Snowman' (complete with red scarf). Playing this game beyond the holiday season literally meant it could be Christmas Day every day in your household as you collected the parts needed, *Jetpac*-style, to bring your seasonal friend to life. Rather hot flames (with legs dare we say) roam the levels cruelly intent on 'melting' the collected snow parts that are being carried back to base – get singed by these 'flameboyant' pests and the appendage in transit is transported to another part of the level awaiting gathering up once again. A slight brush of a 'Sleep Monster' sees the loss of a life as sleep deprivation and dreams of a holiday in a warmer climate kick in. And what you may ask is the reward for completing a level? A rendition of 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer' – somehow we feel 'Walking in the Air' would be more appropriate.



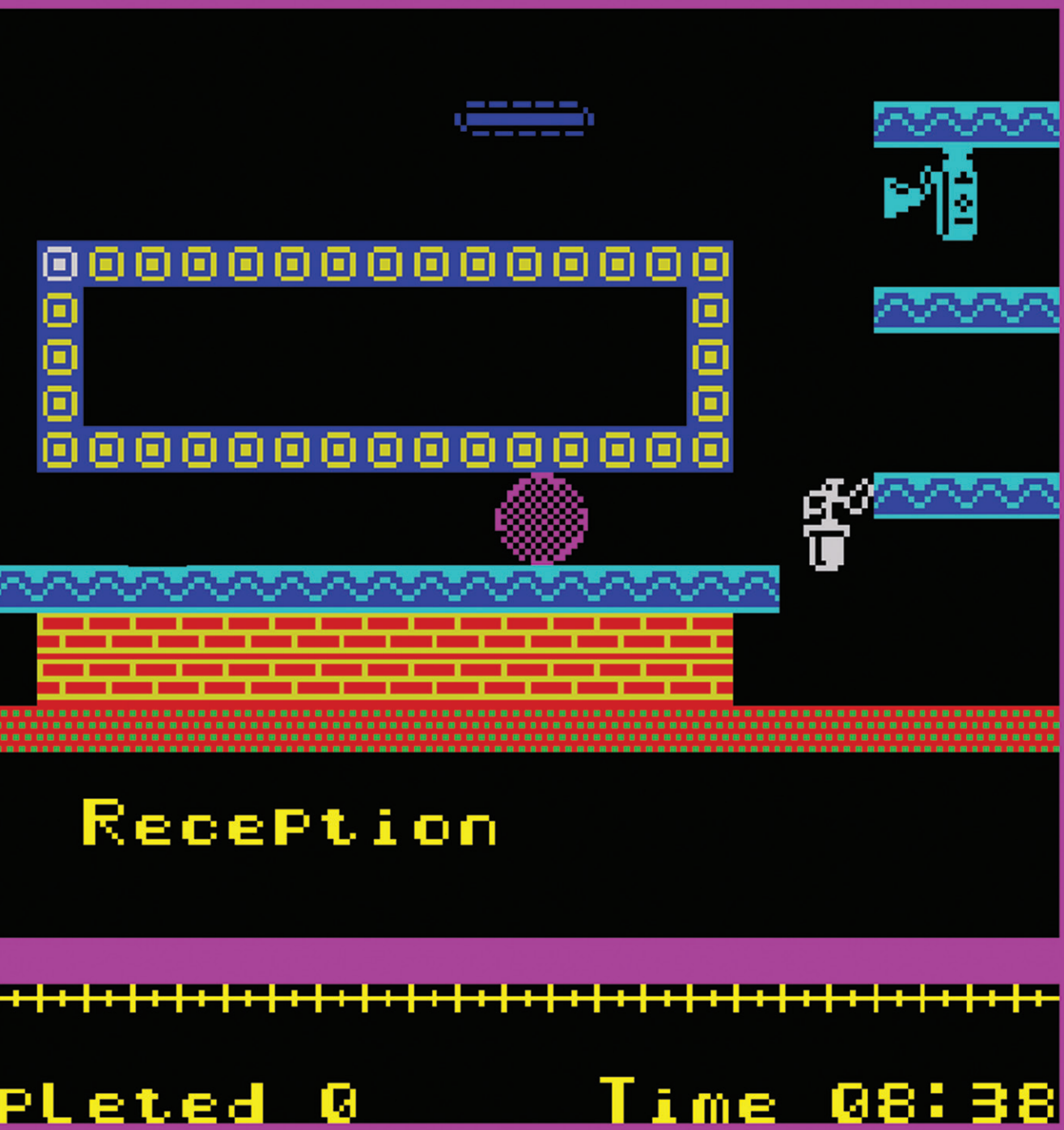
HEWSON CONSULTANTS



Name	:	Technician Ted
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Hewson Consultants
Author	:	Steve Marsden, David Cooke

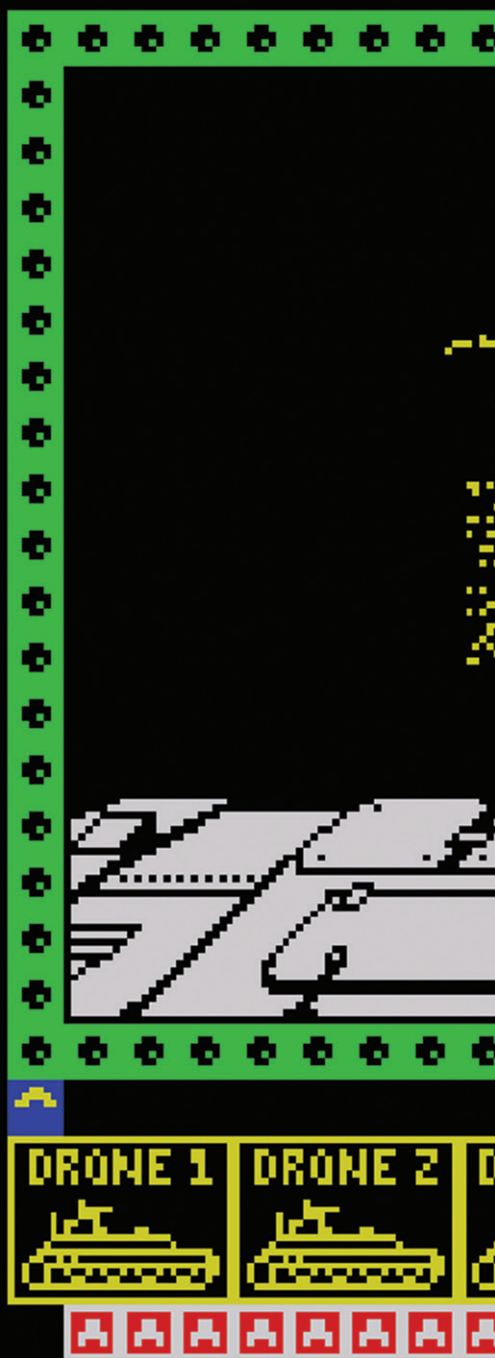


Jet Set Willy spawned a raft of wannabe hit Spectrum titles that hoped to ride on the success of Matthew Smith's huge hit. *Technician Ted* is one such title, but its design, graphical flair and premise put the game at number 84 in the Your Sinclair's top 100 games back in 1992. Ted has to explore a myriad of factory rooms in the search for chips (of the silicon type) whilst dodging all sorts of objects, some of which are no doubt the cousins, aunties and uncles of those found in *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* on a day trip out. In some of the rooms, there are even some subliminal references to Mr Smith's games – see if you can find them. *TT* is a thinking man's *JSW* with each room needing careful consideration and strategy just to get through. A talking point of the game is its loading screen – animated different coloured Teds marching up and down the screen as a numerical clock counts down to zero to as the game loads. This was a first in the day and set the precedent for many games thereafter.



HEWSON CONSULTANTS

Name	:	3D Seiddab Attack
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Hewson Consultants
Author	:	Steve Turner



HEWSON CONSULTANTS LTD

presents

SEIDDAB ATTACK

© 1983 S Turner

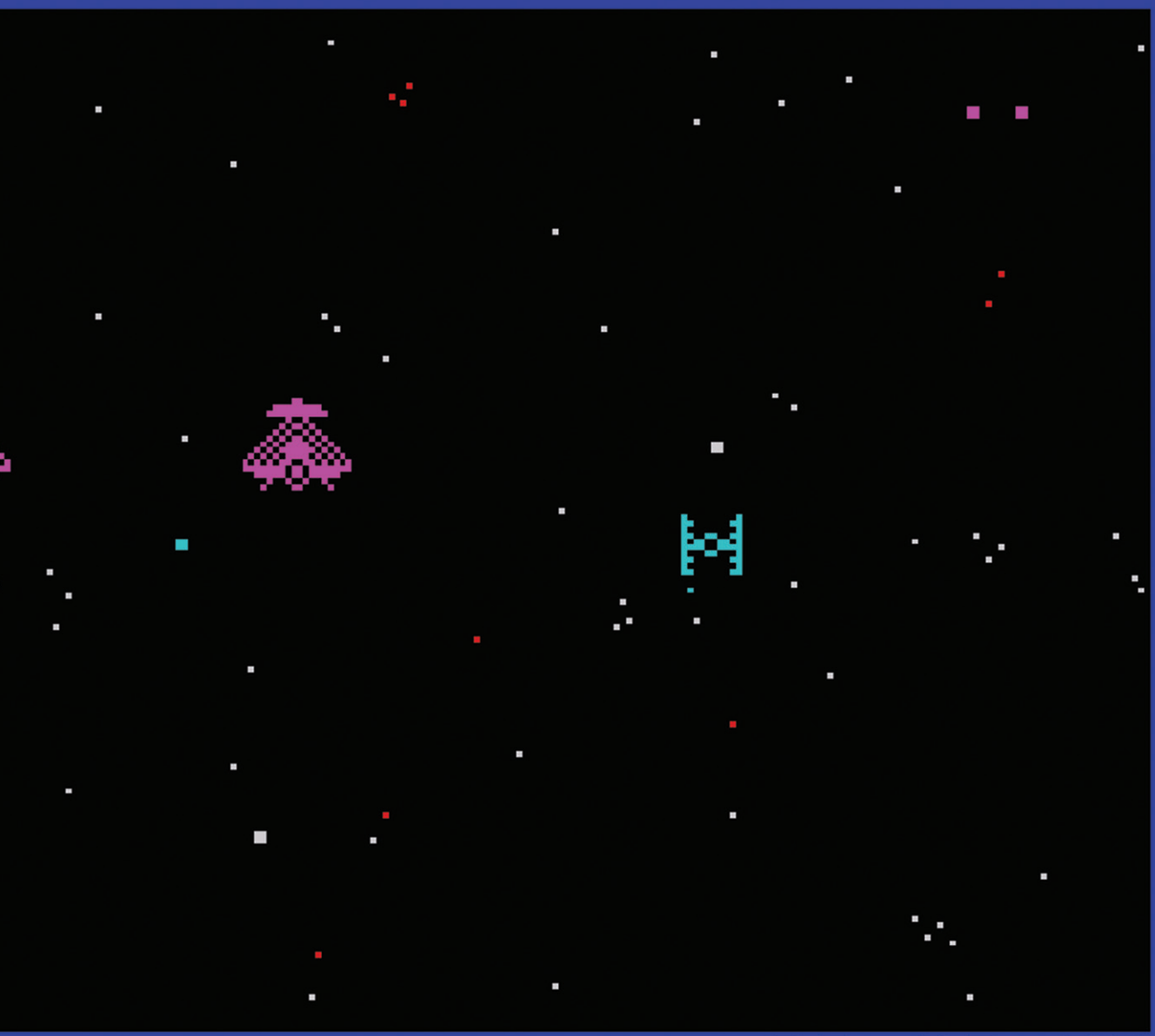
PLEASE WAIT

Although you might not guess it from the inexplicably unusual title (oh hang on it is 'baddies' backwards), this is actually the second game in a Spectrum trilogy all made by the same developer, Steve Turner. Preceded by *3D Space Wars* and followed by *3D Lunattack*, it broke new ground in home computer gaming, but suffered from being a little too far ahead of its time. *3D Seiddab Attack* made use of a split screen to help guide you through the virtual city streets. A radar delivered a top-down view, which was an important aspect of the user interface as it helped you to mentally put the futuristic 3D graphics in the main viewer into perspective. Among the monochromatic dots that build up the cityscape (and, later, the wilderness) were attacking aliens, known as Seiddabs, ready to be taken out with your surface-to-air missiles. This three dimensional effect polarised gamers and reviewers alike back in 1984. The game was certainly overreaching its grasp, given the hardware available to it, but that apparent shortcoming also turned out to be its greatest achievement and demands recognition.

GARGOYLE GAMES

Name	:	Ad Astra
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Gargoyle Games
Author	:	Roy Carter, Greg Follis

Found plundering the depths of space somewhere between *Galaga, Tempest* and *Space Invaders*, it's a wonder that this debut title from Gargoyle Games has never been remade, revamped or followed up. It takes the then familiar *Space Invaders* trope and angles it to give the game a three dimensional depth that worked beautifully. This was bolstered by the ability to fly your large, triangular space ship all around the screen, taking pot shots at the plethora of attacking aliens, floating space mines and asteroids. The latter couldn't actually be destroyed, but it was a thrill to dodge them as they hurtled by. The shading and detail was incredible, and the rotation of the rocks made them wonderfully realistic and gave you a real notion of the dangers of space travel. *Ad Astra* came and went without a great deal of fanfare, which it deserved every bit as much as the next game. It's a shame to think it might have otherwise been forgotten, so if it's new to you, break out the emulator and discover its 31-year-old charm right now.



MIKRO-GEN PRESENTS

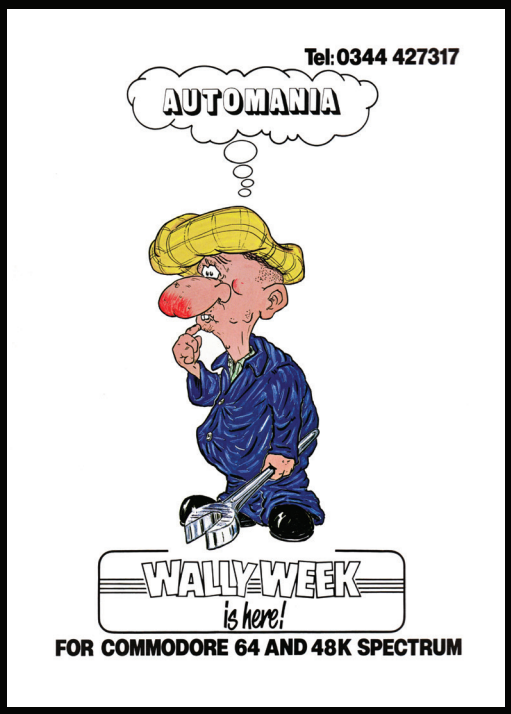
AUTO MANIA

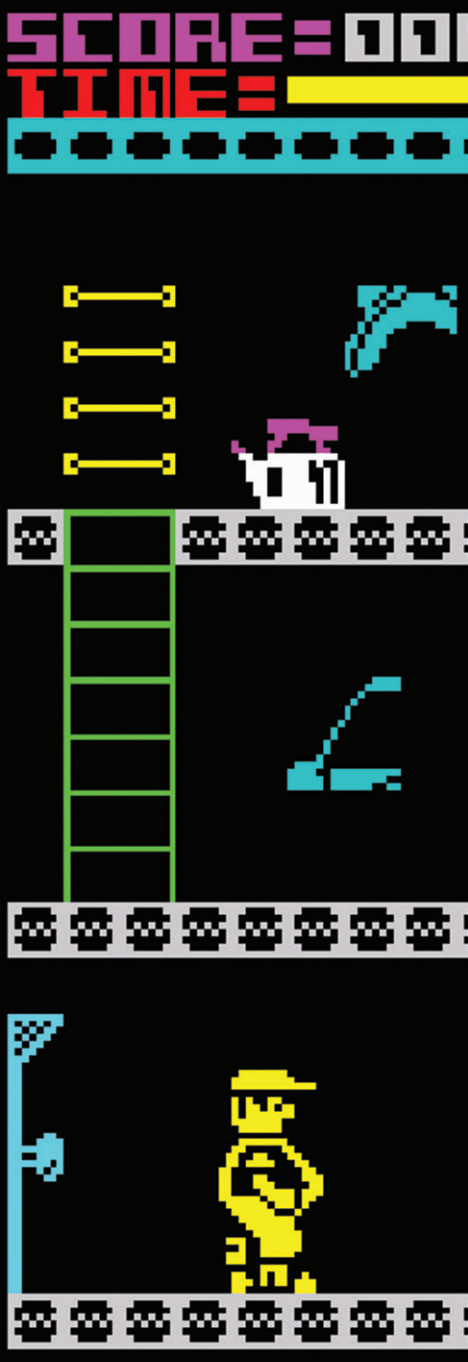
STARRING

WALLY WEEK.....AS HIMSELF
WACKY TYRE 1.....P.RELI
WACKY TYRE 2.....MITCH L.TA

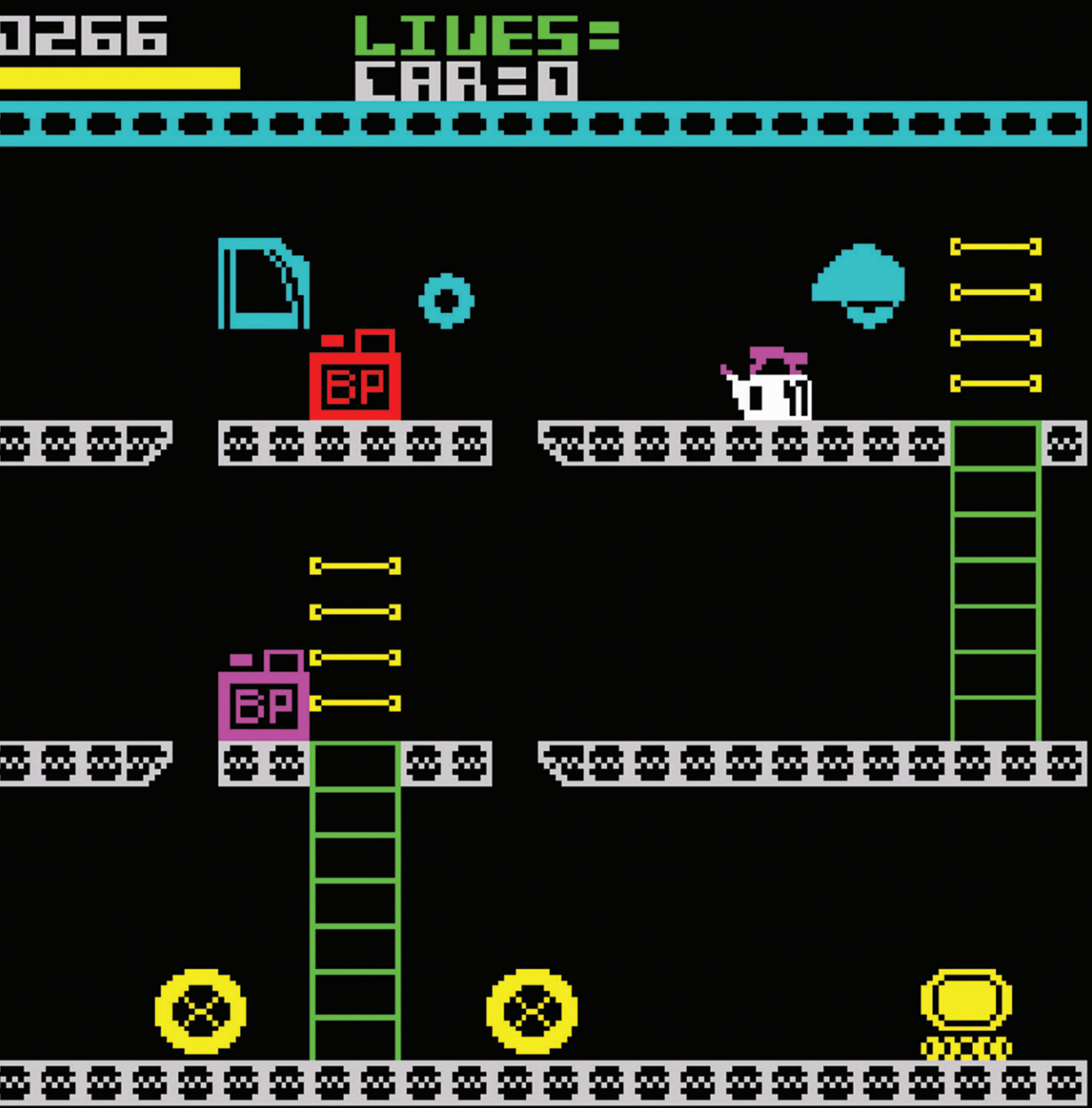
MIKRO-GEN

Name	:	Automania
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Mikro-Gen Ltd
Author	:	Chris Hinsley





Wally Week is an institution on the ZX Spectrum starring in many of Mikro-Gen's most successful titles – mostly on his own, on one occasion with all his family in tow in *Everyone's a Wally*. *Automania* is where Mr Week was introduced to the unsuspecting Spectrum gamer and the premise of the game is to build a car from parts found in the stock room. Sounds simple enough – the problem Wally faces is that the car factory is populated with killer robots, bouncing tyres and car parts that fall from the overhead gantries that kill on contact. When all six parts of the car are fitted in place, the car is driven off and replaced with a further part-built vehicle. Wally games are renowned for bold, colourful graphics and this game does not disappoint – Wally is also beautifully animated and small touches like him turning to give you a knowing look on completing a task shoot this game into the classic section in the games catalogue.

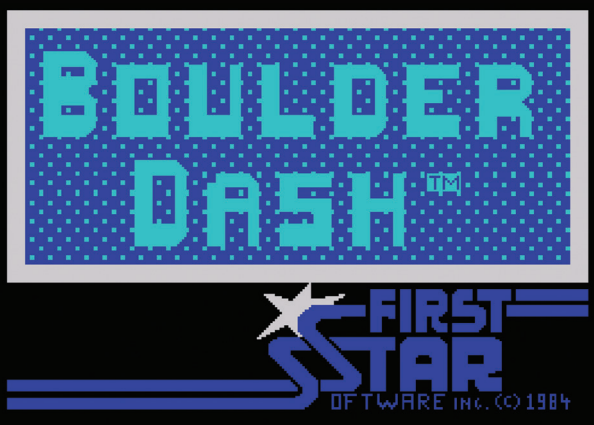


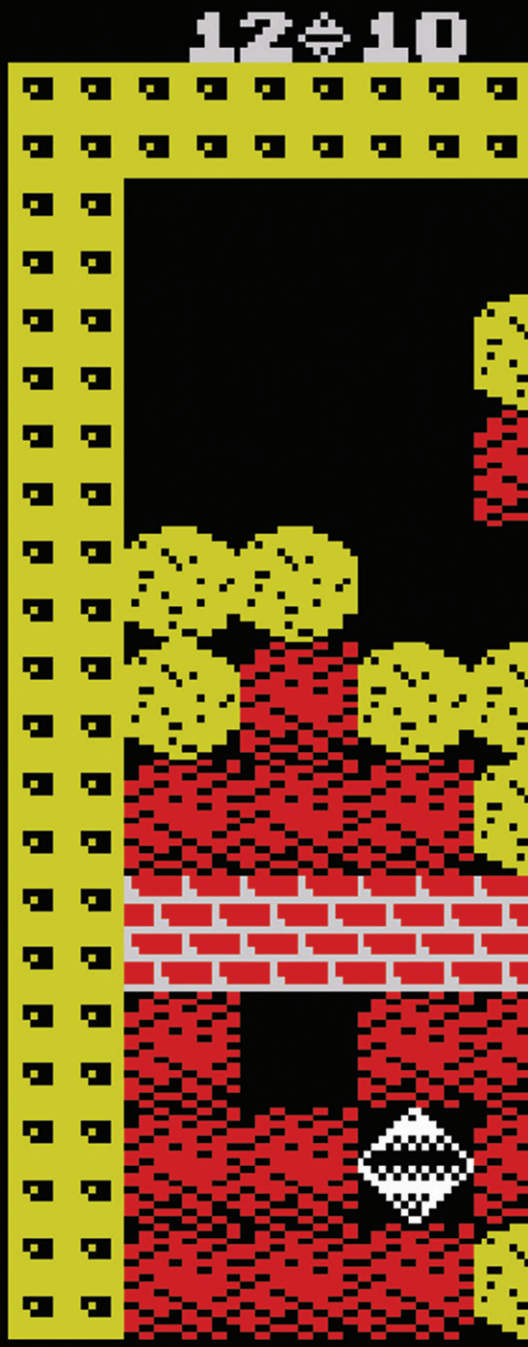
Name : Boulder Dash

Year : 1984

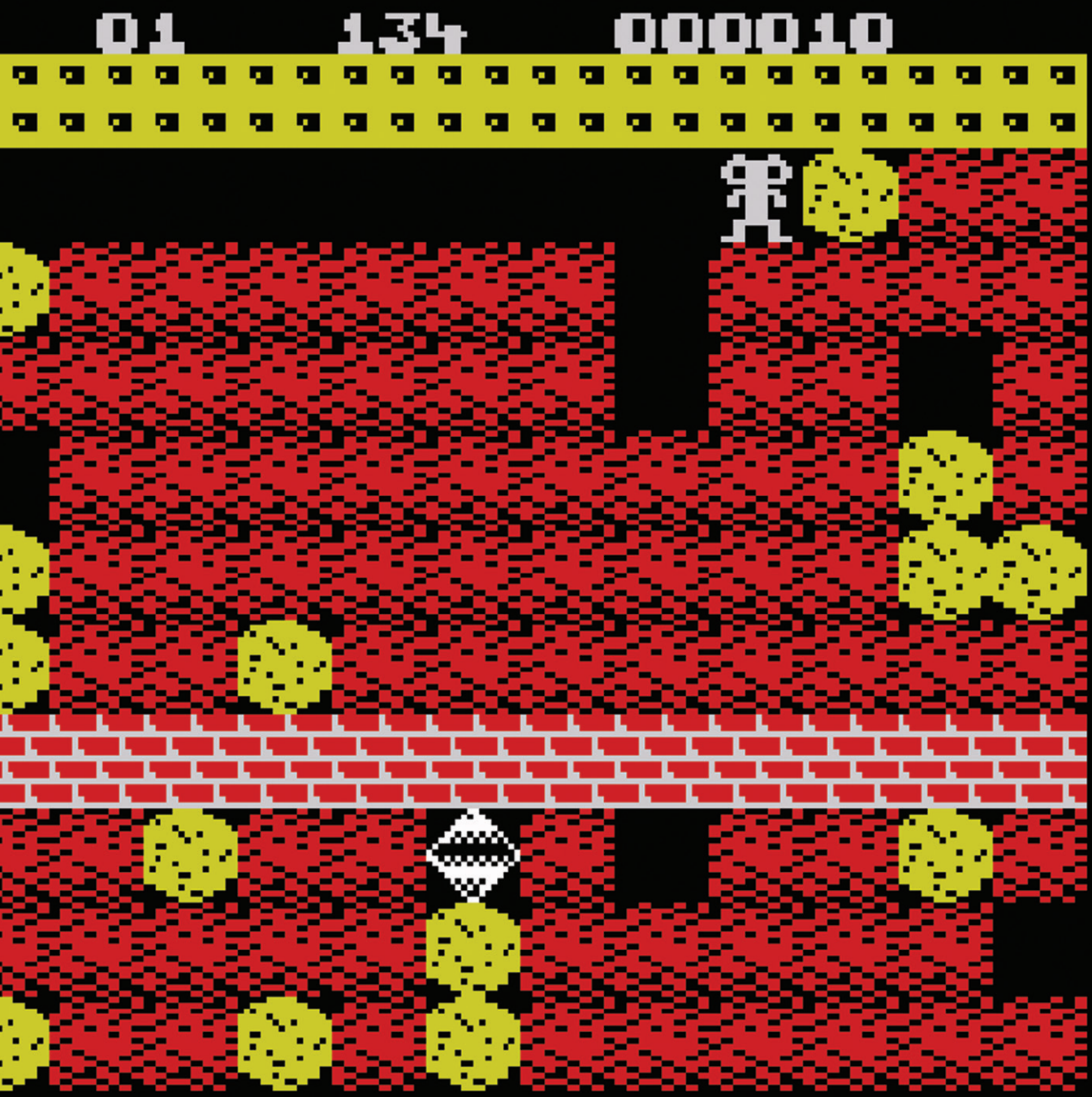
Publisher : Front Runner

Author : Dalali Software Ltd, Peter Liepa, Chris Gray

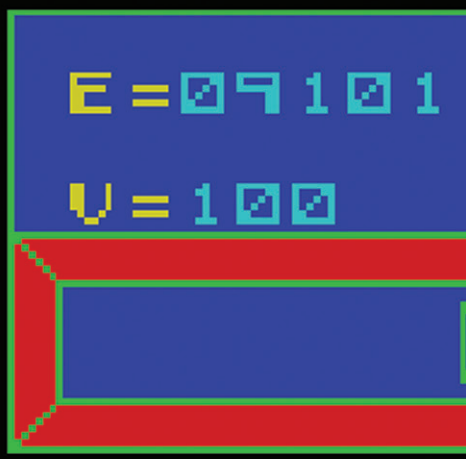




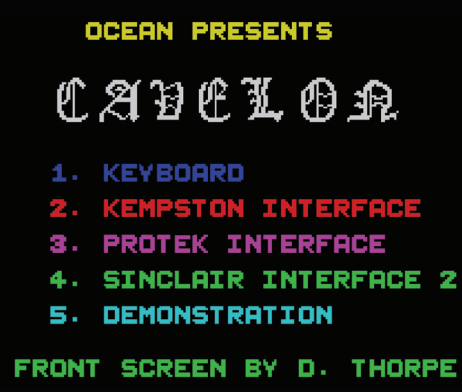
The only famous Rockford before *Boulder Dash* had a huge collection of files and made a regular appearance on British TV. With this conversion of First Star's US C64 smash hit, Spectrum owners would soon realise the danger of taking on Rockford's plight in burrowing out of the caverns he found himself in. 16 mystical caves and five levels of difficulty give this title a longevity not afforded to many Spectrum titles with ingenious layouts making the seemingly simple task of collecting diamonds an addictive challenge that led to many long hours at the keyboard for many players. Later levels include crushing butterflies that turn into precious crystals ready for collecting and amoebas that block paths, usually just where Rockford had planned his escape route. It takes a huge amount of brainpower and concentration to master the 'physics' of this game and guide Rockford, the burrowing bug, to victory. Rockford's debut is a simple but fiendishly devised and addictive game where 'one last go' repeats ad infinitum.



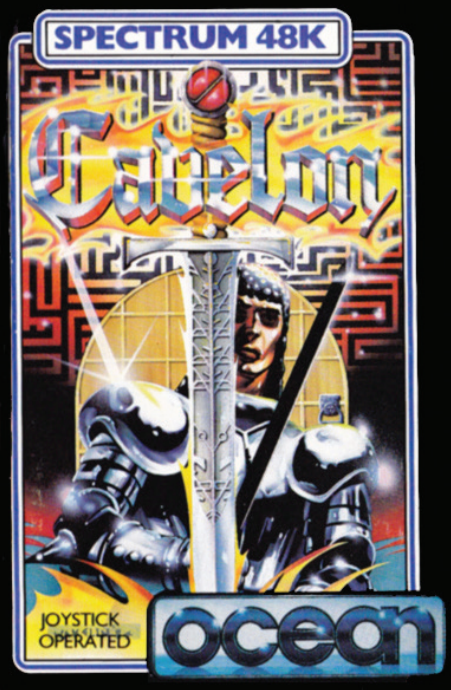
Name	:	Codename MAT
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Micromega
Author	:	Derek Brewster

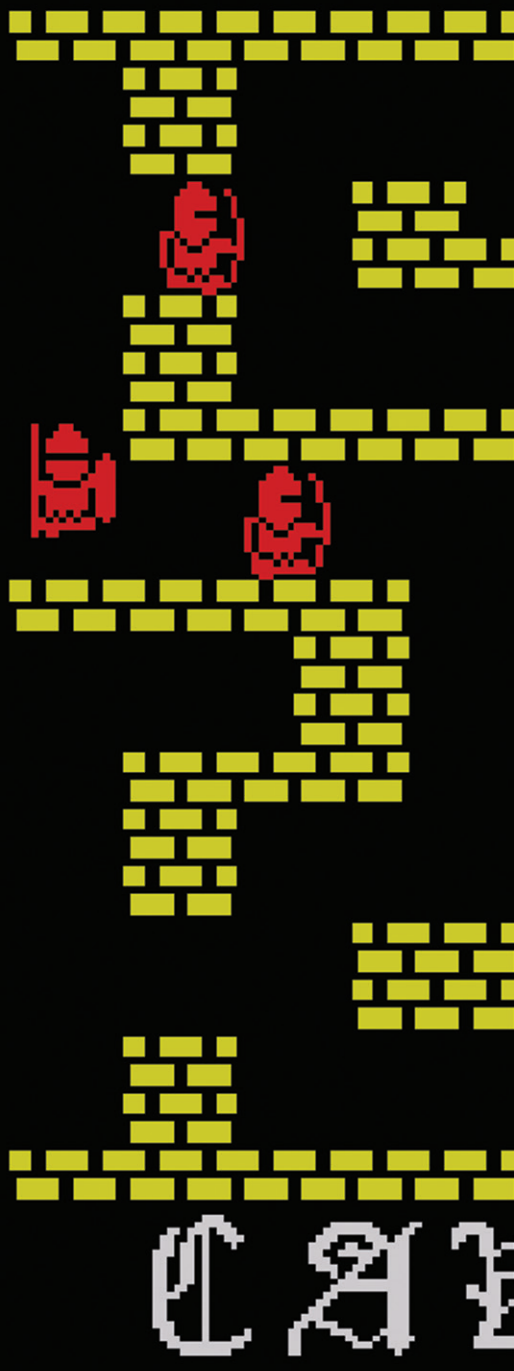


Another epic title put together by just one developer, *Codename MAT* (meaning Mission: Alien Termination) is a powerful, intense and rich sci-fi gameplaying experience. Myon invaders hide around every corner of the solar system, with the player tasked with taking to the deep black in an effort to repel them. The game is in 3D, and built using creator Derek Brewster's homemade and highly efficient graphics engine. Where other 3D games crawled along, *Codename MAT* proves fast and furious. So fast, in fact, that a tracking computer is included that automatically switches between front and rear views when aliens come within range. Your ship, the Centurion, is equally well made, and suffers damage to individual components rather than the ship as a whole and is repaired by limping back to the space station. This game competes with Elite in terms of strategic and deep gameplay, but layers in some great arcade action to become a sci-fi epic in its own right. Although mostly overlooked by gaming history, *Codename MAT* is remembered for its grandeur and quality.



Name	:	Cavelon
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Paul Owens, Christian F. Urquhart, F. David Thorpe





An extremely young Chris Urquhart, who later went on to create *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* for Ocean Software with Paul Owens, developed *Cavelon* based on the arcade game of the same name. The game is a simple maze adventure where a gallant knight is on a quest to the top of a tower to save his Guinevere from the evil wizard. By collecting pieces of door scattered over a scrolling maze (which scrolls jarringly screen by screen on the Spectrum), the door to the next level of the tower is opened. The Excalibur sword makes an appearance every now and again and if collected gives immunity to our gallant knight from the other 'evil' knights roaming the levels and the arrows they fire. The final level, at the top of the tower, features the wizard himself whose armoury boasts of bolts of lightning (very, very frightening!). Destroying the Wizard predictably sends our knight back to the base of the tower as that silly Guinivere has got herself kidnapped again and it's onwards to another gallant quest.

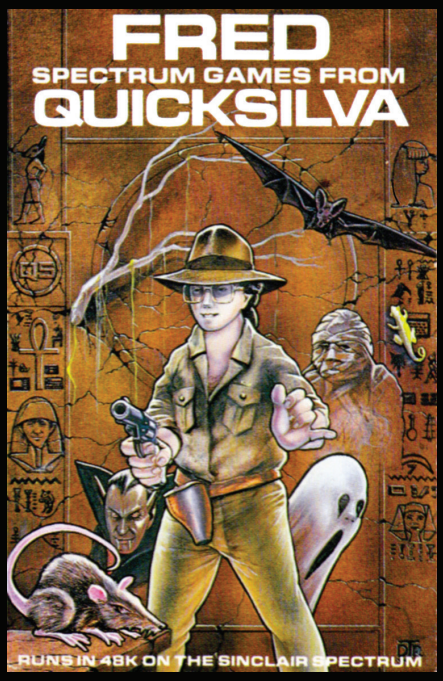
QUICKSILVA

FRED

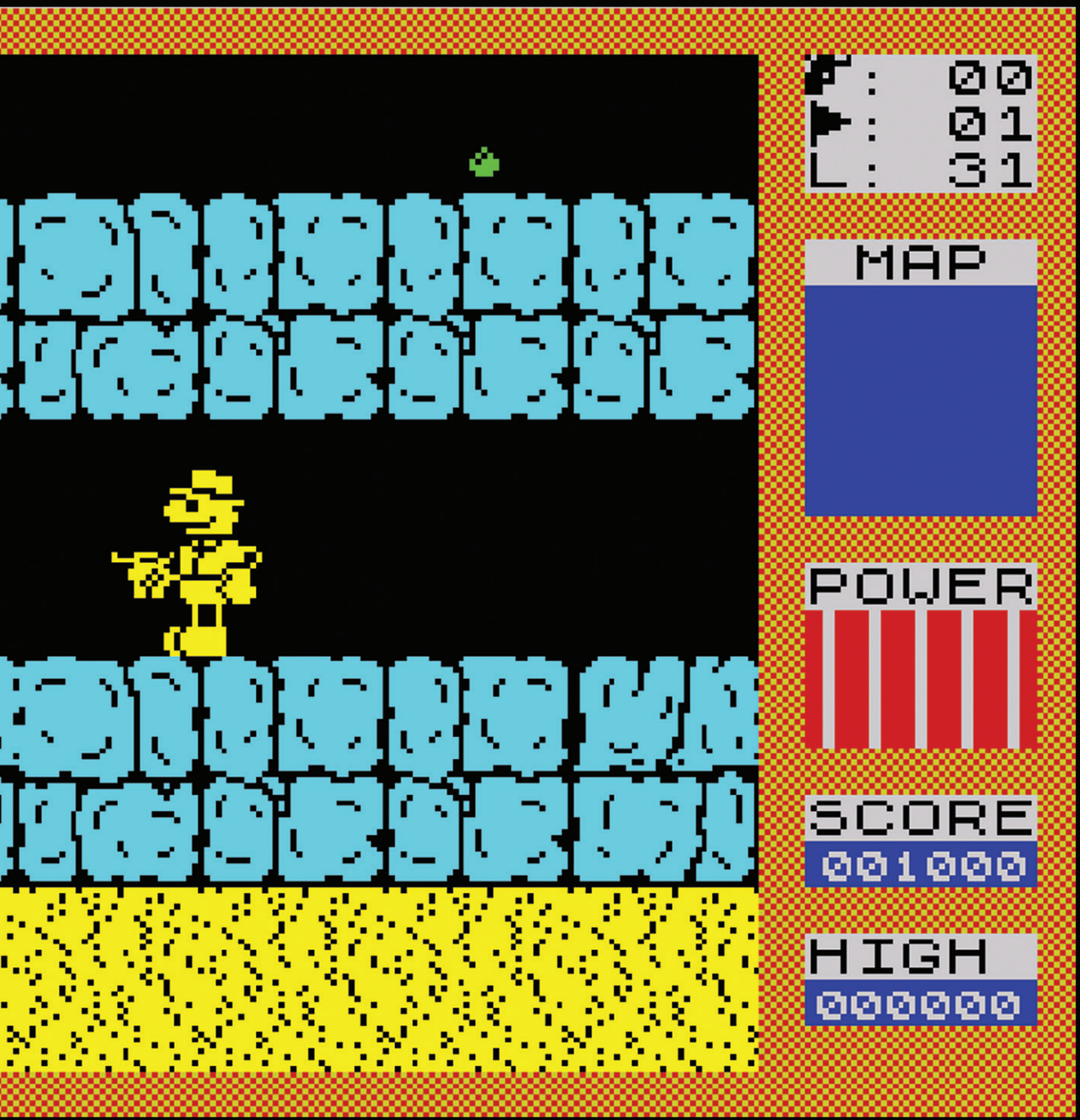
1) JOYSTICK
2) KEYBOARD
3) REDEFINE KEYS
4) PLAY GAME

WRITTEN BY FERNANDO RADA,
PACO MENENDEZ & CARLOS GRANADOS.
© INDESCOMP SPAIN
PRESENTED BY QUICKSILVA
PRESENTATION SCREEN DESIGN:
JUAN DELCAN, KIKI & MA
CHARACTER DESIGN: GAELIC
PET: SENATOR & DRULY'S DUCK
MISTAKES: MARTA & PALOMA

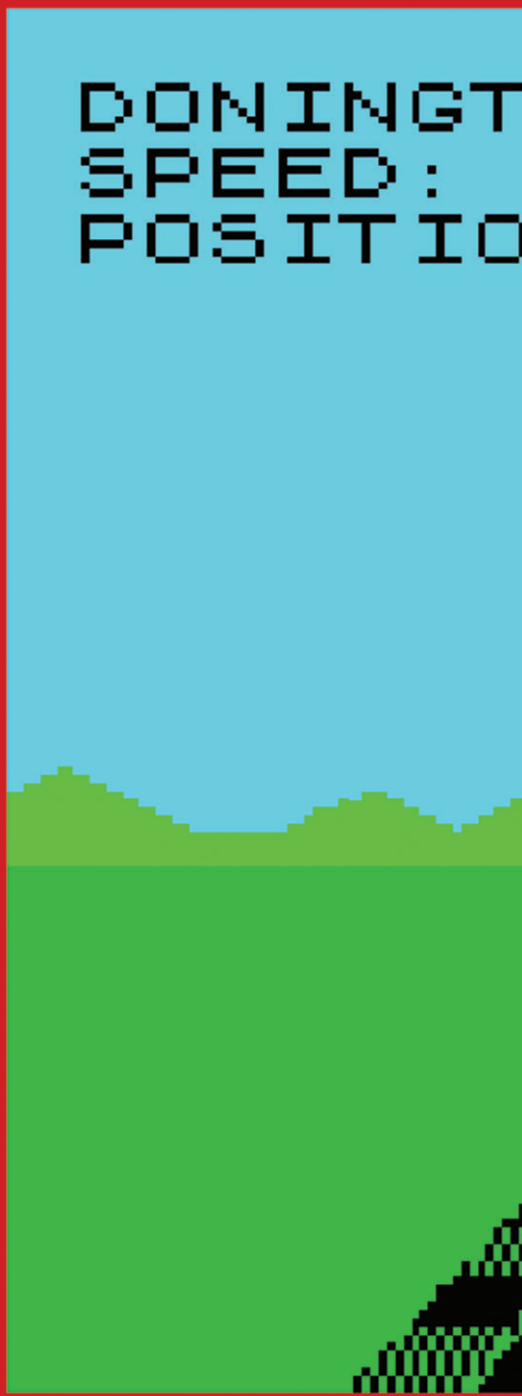
Name	:	Fred
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Quicksilva
Author	:	Carlos Granados Martinez, Paco Menendez, Fernando Rada Briega, Juan Delcan



Fred is the closest a gamer could come at the time to playing as archeological explorer Indiana Jones as tombs are explored and exits to the outside world searched for. It seems rude these days for tombs not to be inhabited with rats, bats, mummies, ghosts, vampires and skeletons that roam the dark corridors looking for unsuspecting explorers to terrorise – this game has them all and more. Fred seems to have also chosen a six barrel gun over an 'Indy' whip and further ammunition can be found littered around that can be picked up. There are a total of six mazes to escape from and this should prove to be an arduous task for even the most experienced explorer. The reward for your gaming prowess – well you can create your own mazes to explore. *Fred* is an early game with great cartoon qualities and, with its frustratingly addictive gameplay, is an early Spectrum favourite.

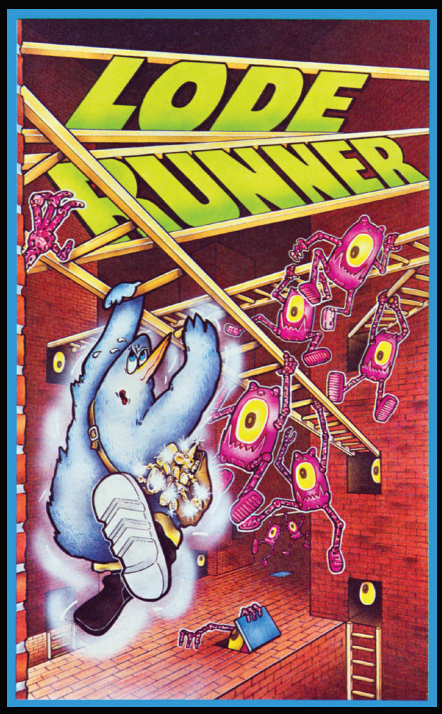


Name	:	Full Throttle
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Micromega
Author	:	Mervyn J. Estcourt



You may recognise the name of the developer of this game as the very same coder who programmed *3D Deathchase* for the 16K Spectrum. There were not too many good racing games available back in 1984 on the Spectrum, and even less racing bike simulators. The crude, flickery graphics of *Full Throttle* were therefore mostly overlooked as you sped around familiar sounding racetracks, such as Donington, that you had seen Barry Sheen shooting around on the TV. The simulation of speed is impressive as the chevron edged track shifts left and right as your bike is manoeuvred around the rather flat surfaces of each location, reaching speeds of up to 175 (mph we assume). One can imagine that Mervyn used the same *Deathchase* scrolling routines in this game, swapping out the bikes and resisting the temptation of leaving the guns in place. *Full Throttle* is a great example of where gameplay wins over graphics and was an instant hit for Micromega.

Name	:	Lode Runner
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Software Projects
Author	:	David J. Anderson, Ian Morrison

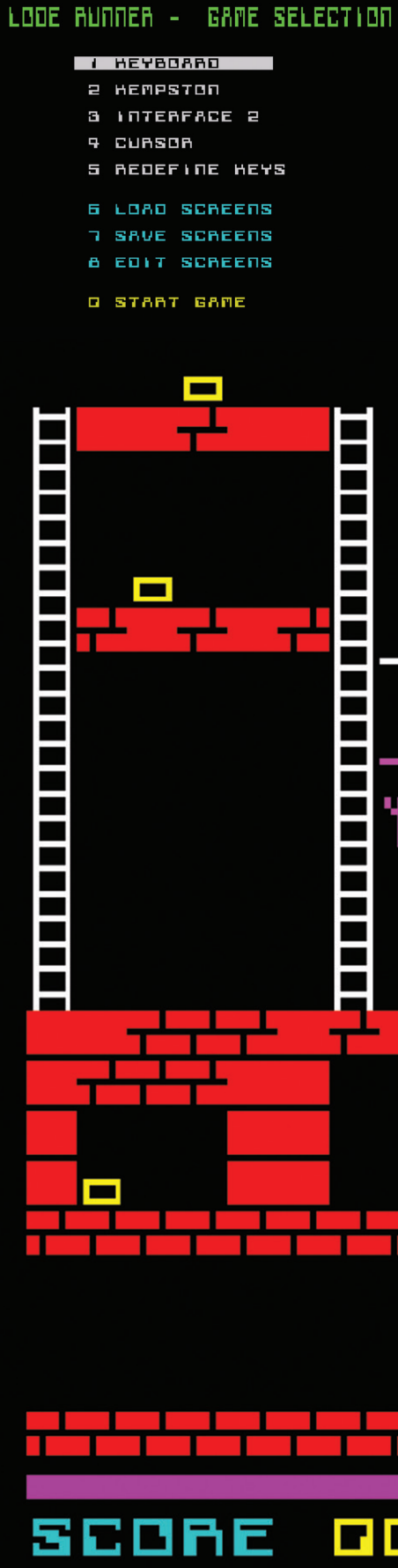


SOFTWARE PROJECTS

PROUDLY PRESENT

BRODERBUND SOFTWARE'S

LODE RUNNER



For a game that began life as something that would only run on one computer housed in a university campus, *Lode Runner* wound up having a huge impact on the entire games industry. By the time this prototype had matured into the title we now recognise as *Lode Runner* for the Spectrum, it had already received development funding from its publisher to the tune of $10,000. Players found themselves in complex building-sized puzzles, charged with gathering up treasure without being spotted or caught by the patrolling guards. Holes could be dug in the floor to avoid capture, or you could swing around on bars and run up and down ladders as you tried to survive this invigorating cat and mouse game. So besides being an early ancestor of the stealth game, what made *Lode Runner* so special? It's because this was the first game ever to include a level editor, and that captured the attention of gamers around the world. It inspired level design competitions, and encouraged a huge number of young players to get into game creation in the first place.

Name	:	Psytron
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Beyond
Author	:	Tayo Olowu, Paul Voysey

Interestingly enough, when *Psytron* was released it landed 'Game of the Month' in the excellent games magazine, Computer & Video Games (better, and more fondly known as C&VG). But wait! Developer Beyond Games was part of publishing company Emap International, which just so happened to make C&VG. Conspiracies aside, *Psytron* would likely have landed that accolade anyway, as this was one behemoth of a game. It was packaged in an oversized box, which was needed to house the manual that came with the tapes. Reading through the book alone was no small task, but a necessary one to really get to grips with running the futuristic colony on Betula 5. You were in charge of everything, from the medical centre and food stores to the oxygen generator and teleporter that built up this huge base. Naturally it was under attack the whole time too, so you had to ration your resources and your time astutely if you wanted the base to keep running. There was so much to do that *Psytron* earned itself a reputation as an almost impossible game to beat, but it was damn fun trying.

Melbourne House

```
The sun streams in the two broad
windows in your sitting room. There
is a pipe rack to the right of the
sofa. Bullet pock marks are the
feature of one wall, and charts and
diagrams fill another. An acid
stained table sits in the corner. To
the west there is your door. To the
north there is a plain door. You can
see an oil lamp, your armchair and
watsons armchair. In watsons
armchair there is Watson. Watson is
carrying the daily chronicle.
Watson looks up from the paper and
says " Good morning Holmes. "
:( Mon 08:01am
> +
```

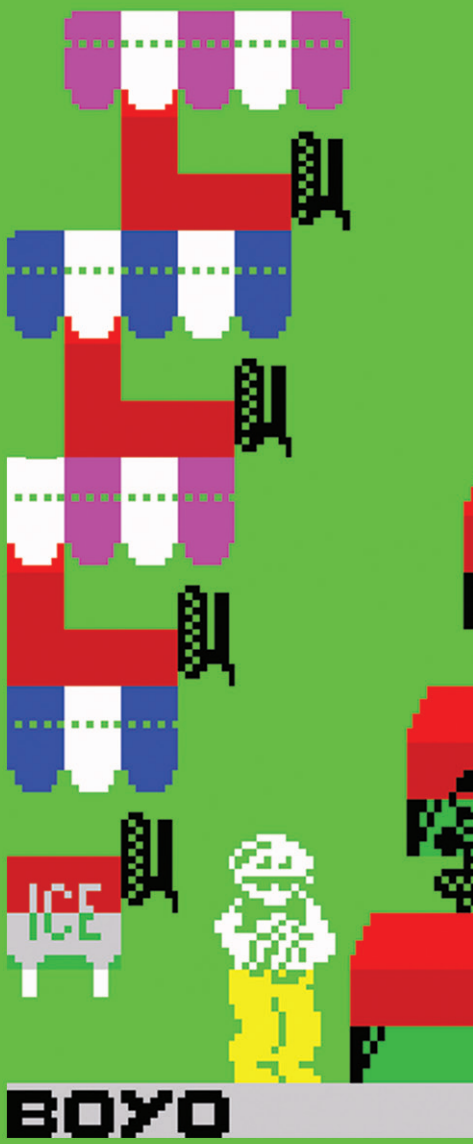
Name	:	Sherlock
Year	:	1984
Publisher	:	Melbourne House
Author	:	Philip Mitchell

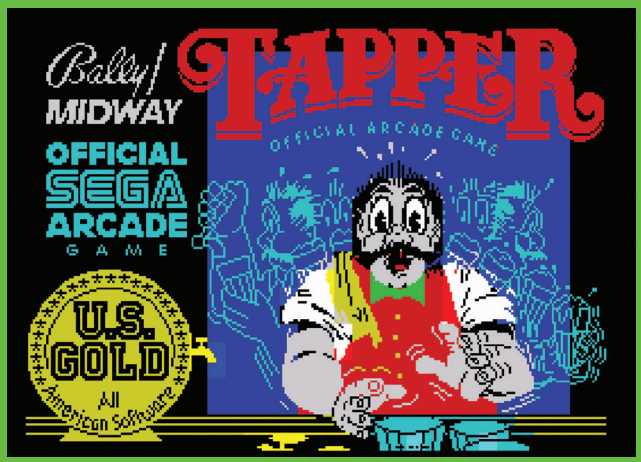

```
You are i
entrance
Above the
stairway.
south the
 front doo

:( Mon 08:
> D.
 YOU CANN
> W.
> D.
> +
```

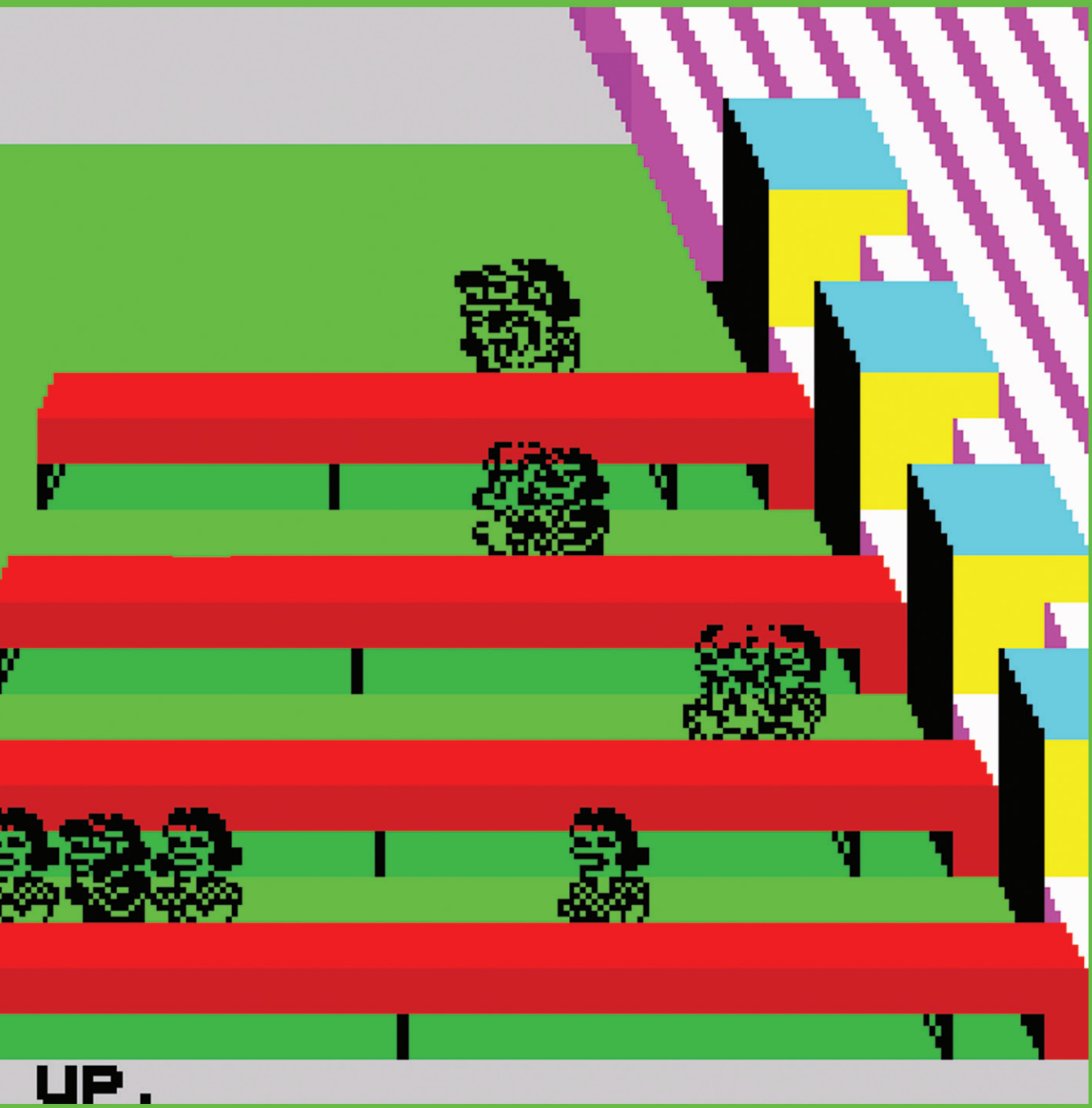
The *Sherlock Holmes* text adventure was over 18 months in development, and the team even had a Holmes expert on staff to help with accuracy, vernacular and plot authenticity. The result was one of the most complete *Sherlock Holmes* games ever made, at the risk of alienating anyone new to text adventures, or the cerebral challenges of donning the deer stalker. Watson convinces you, as the famous detective, to investigate a double murder in the town of Leatherhead, so off you go with Inspector Lestrade in tow. There is good reason for including these ancillary characters, as the intelligent game engine allows you to converse with them and encourage them to perform actions for you, and gives them a degree of autonomy within the story. Events even move in real time, so if you want to catch a train you need a timetable, and you need to stick to it. This, along with the game's depth of intelligence, make it pretty damn hard, but it still remains one of the most complete and engaging Holmes digitisations ever made.

Name	:	Tapper
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	US Gold
Author	:	Ian Morrison, David J. Anderson, Robin Muir, Duncan Sinclair, Paul Holmes, F. David Thorpe



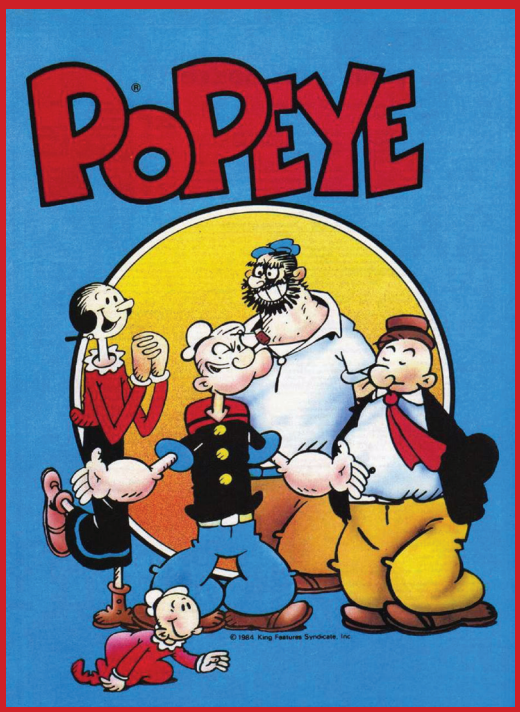


With a rather grown up theme where the sole aim of the game is to keep the drinking pundits happy by sliding pints of beer down the numerous bar tops and then collecting the returning glasses – *Tapper* proved to be great fun and great practice for that time when you got a bar job to pay your fees in college. The action becomes frantic as the race is on to pull the pints in time and then collect the glasses from other bars – if a glass is broken or a punter gets to the end of the bar looking for his drink then it's a life lost. Between bar levels there's a mini game where cans are shaken then shuffled – pick the unshaken one to avoid a messy explosion. If you wait patiently then some cheerleaders turn up to spur you on. And that's it – a game that always begs one more go that ultimately sees glasses dropped onto the floor as the action speeds up and the reflexes slow. Mention should also be made of the annoying looping beepy music – there, it's mentioned.

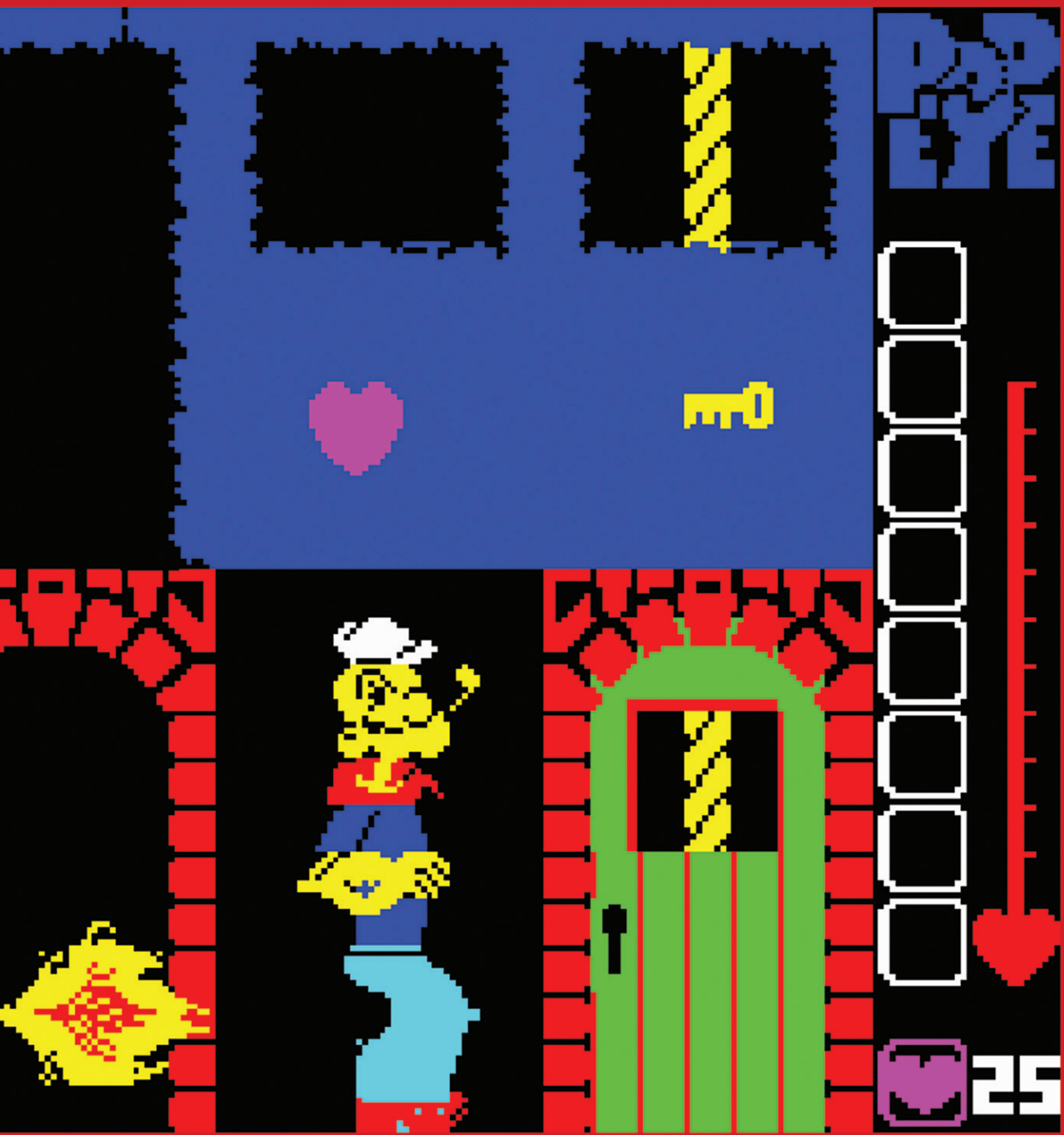


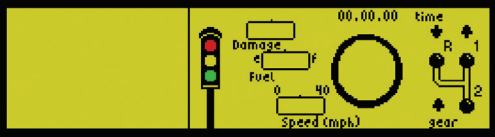
dk'tronics

Name : Popeye
Year : 1985
Publisher : DK'Tronics
Author : Don Priestley



The *Trap Door* games, also by Don Priestley, wowed gamers with their absolutely huge charismatic characters that pretty much took up half the TV screen. Well, Don has only gone and done it again but this time with *Popeye* – so here we have Popeye, Bluto and Olive Oyl in a game that is as close to comic book, in terms of visual finesse, as is technically possible on the Spectrum. Popeye is a sensitive soul and must prove his love for Olive by collecting 20 hearts littered around the town. Bluto, and other larger than life creatures, have it in for him and make the task in hand rather difficult. After bumping into Bluto's fist for the 100th time, Popeye is recharged by gulping down a tin of spinach, allowing him to continue on his search. The attribute clash made famous by the Spectrum is kept to a minimum by clever programming – the game though as a consequence does play painfully slow as Popeye ambles slowly between screens. Maybe the game itself could do with one of those tins of spinach.



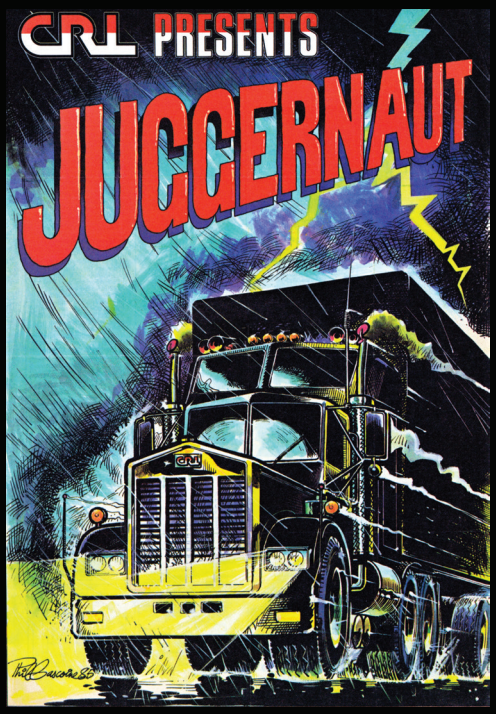


JUGGERNAUT

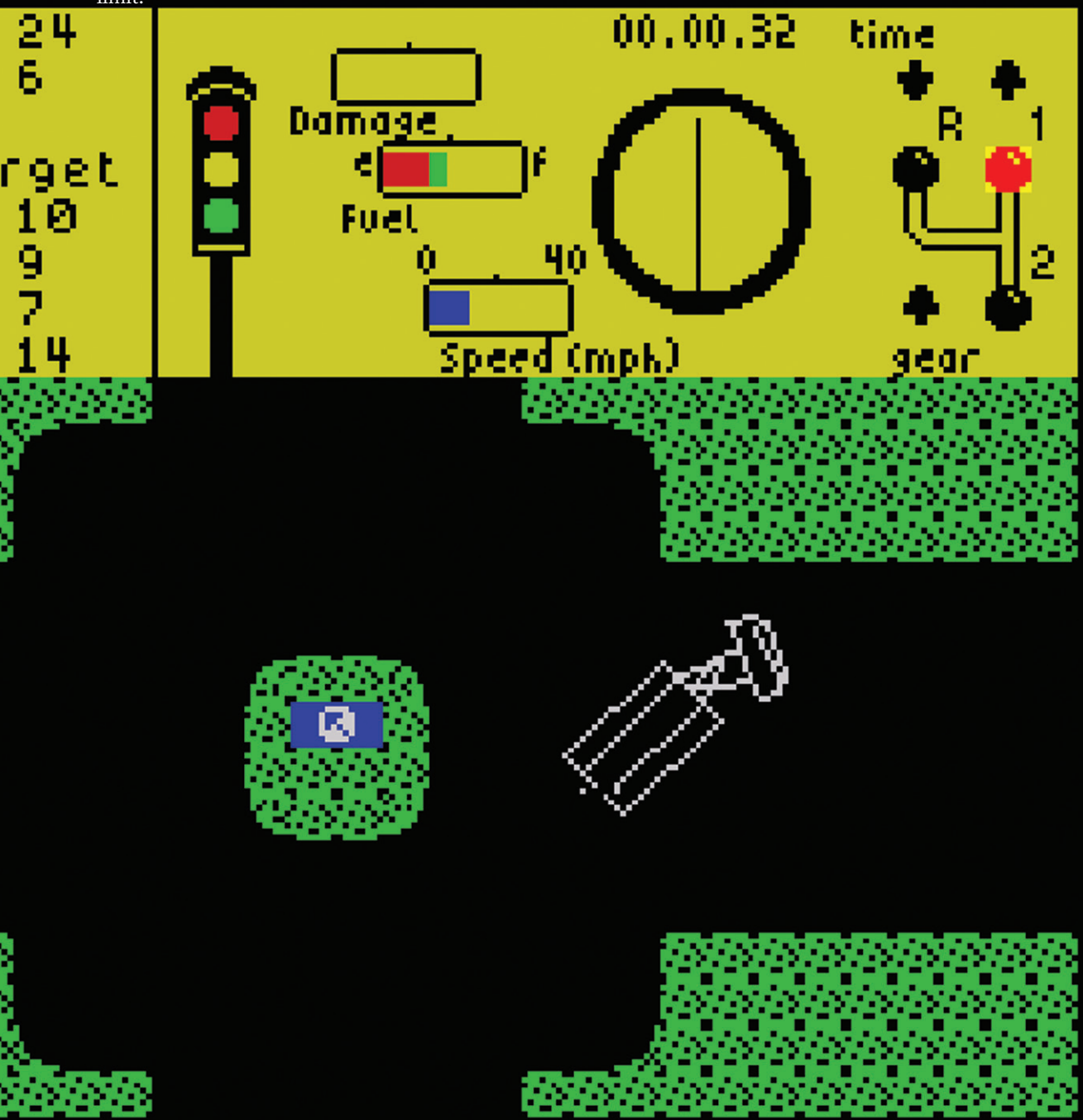
Program by Pete Cooke
Copyright © CRL 1985
Press Fire

CRL

Name	:	Juggernaut
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	CRL
Author	:	Pete Cooke, Ian Ellery, Jay Derrett

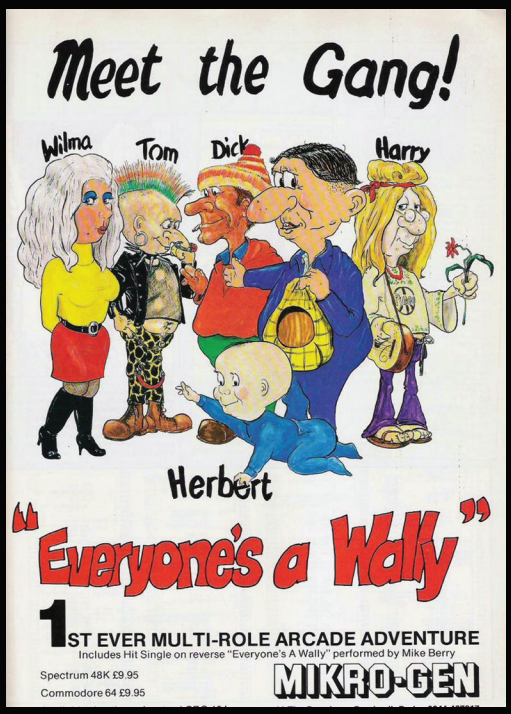


Juggernaut was the first major arcade game from Pete Cooke, and the first of his work published by London software house, CRL. The coder got the idea for the game from a friend who had recently failed his HGV exam. Thinking the physics and complexities of reversing an articulated truck would make for an interesting game (he was a maths teacher after all), Cooke developed a wire-frame truck and an environment for it to drive in before adding the predictable deliver-the-goods type story to his engine. CRL's owner, Clem Chambers, was suitably impressed, calling the game's graphics 'impressively cool' and instantly signing it up. *Juggernaut's* plot is a perfect fit for Cooke's technical idea, despite its inevitability. Taking control of your own lorry as part of a small haulier, your task is to negotiate the largely (and thankfully) vacant streets of a nondescript town, collecting various lots of timber, coal, oil and fruit. To find the relevant wholesalers the player uses one of the public phones scattered around the town to dial directory enquiries – no sat-nav in 1985! Mastering the truck was a task in itself, and not helped by a mission time limit.



MIKRO-GEN

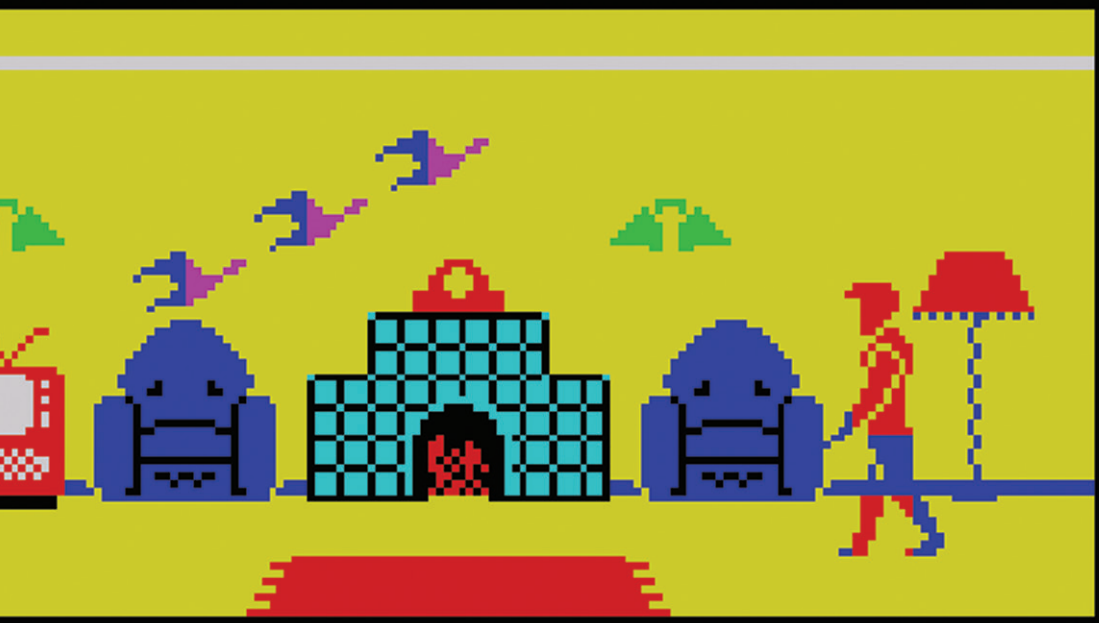
Name	:	Everyone's a Wally
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Mikro-Gen Ltd
Author	:	Chris Hinsley, Neil Strudwick



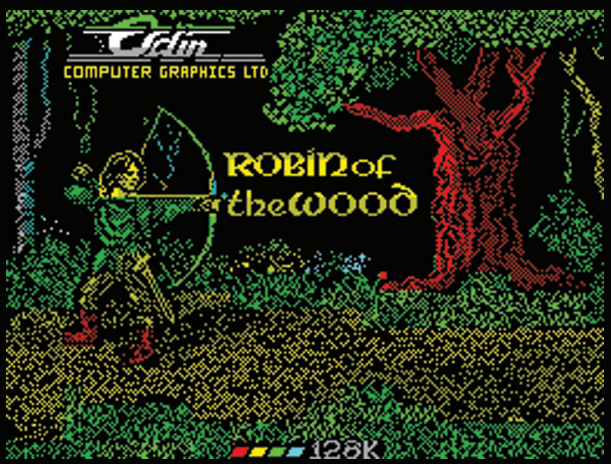
Just when you thought one 'Wally' was enough, it's announced by Mikro-gen that now '***Everyone's a Wally***'. Wally Week from *Automania* and *Pyjamarama* is proud to introduce to you his family – Wilma his wife and Herbert his naughty, troublesome son. The rest of the guys in his gang are Tom, Dick and Harry. Apart from Herbert, all the characters in the game can be controlled one at a time and undertake tasks specific to their skills, for example Dick is a plumber and therefore sorts out the waterworks related activities. The overall aim of the game is to get rich quick by finding all the code letters to crack the bank safe and steal the money, ultimately paying the gang their dues. *Everyone's a Wally* is a continuation of the gameplay that was found in *Pyjamarama* and goes further to incorporate a series of other arcade and adventure games in the mix – there is actually a fully working *Space Invaders* game in the video room for example. Wilma and Herbert make such a splash in *Everyone's a Wally* that they went on appear in their own games.

Name	:	Frankie Goes to Hollywood
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	John Gibson, Karen Davies, Roy Gibson

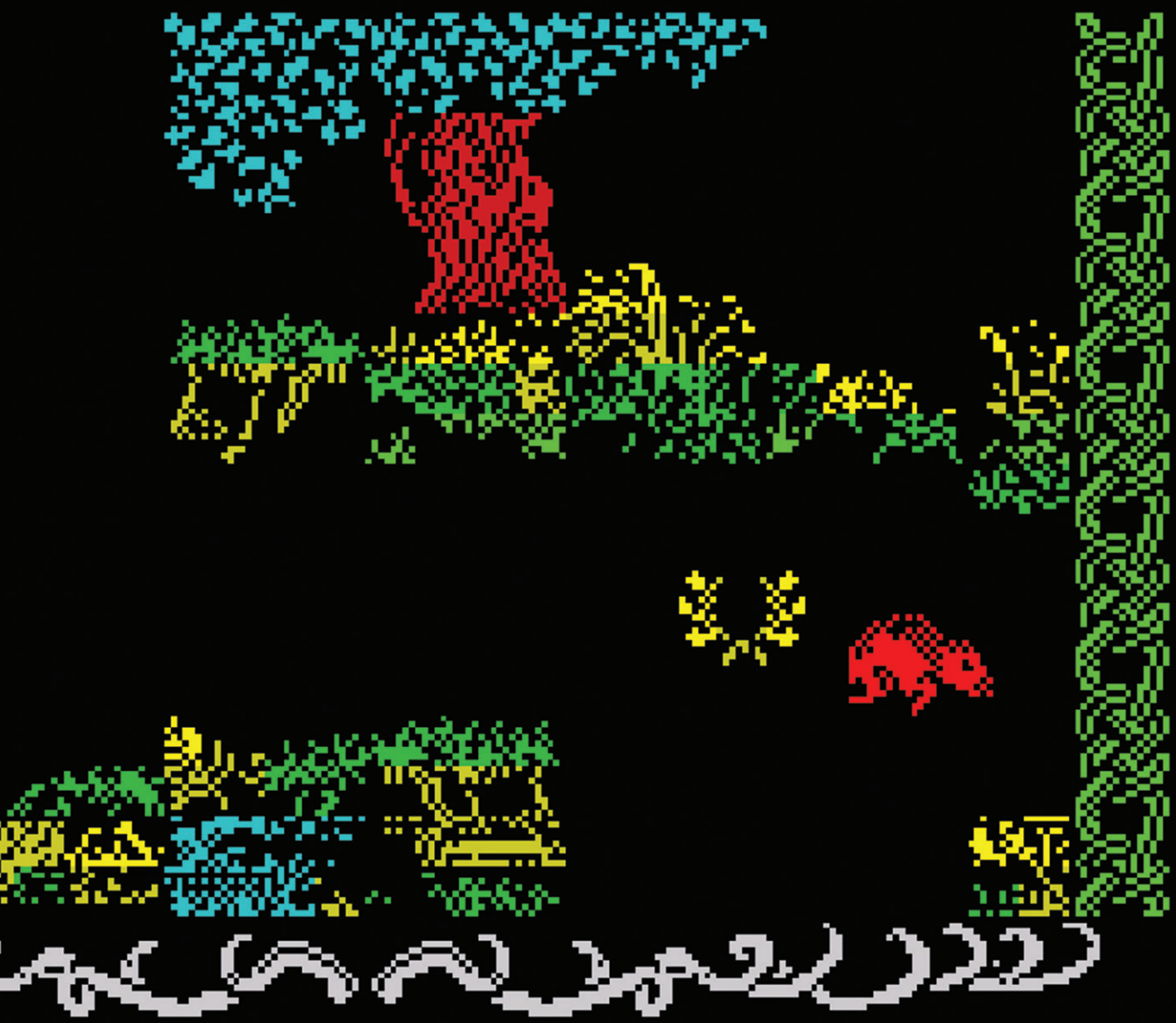
If they gave out awards for the weirdest mainstream ZX Spectrum games then this licensed effort by developer Denton Designs and publisher Ocean would surely be a contender. Based around the successful eighties band of the same name, *Frankie Goes to Hollywood* is a fantastic experience and quite like nothing else of the time, or since. Your task is to explore the town of Mundanesville completing tasks both trivial (giving a cat milk) and heroic (solving a murder) in order to gain pleasure points and become a real person. To achieve this there are also several mini-games such as Talking Heads (a literal spitting contest between world leaders) and Raid Over Merseyside, where the player must shoot down the bombers threatening Liverpool's shipping. Acquire the required amount of pleasure points and the player gains access to the fabled heart of the pleasuredome. Bright, colourful graphics, an open world to explore and an intriguing plot all make *Frankie Goes to Hollywood* one of the finest examples of innovative game designs, whether you are a fan of the band or not.



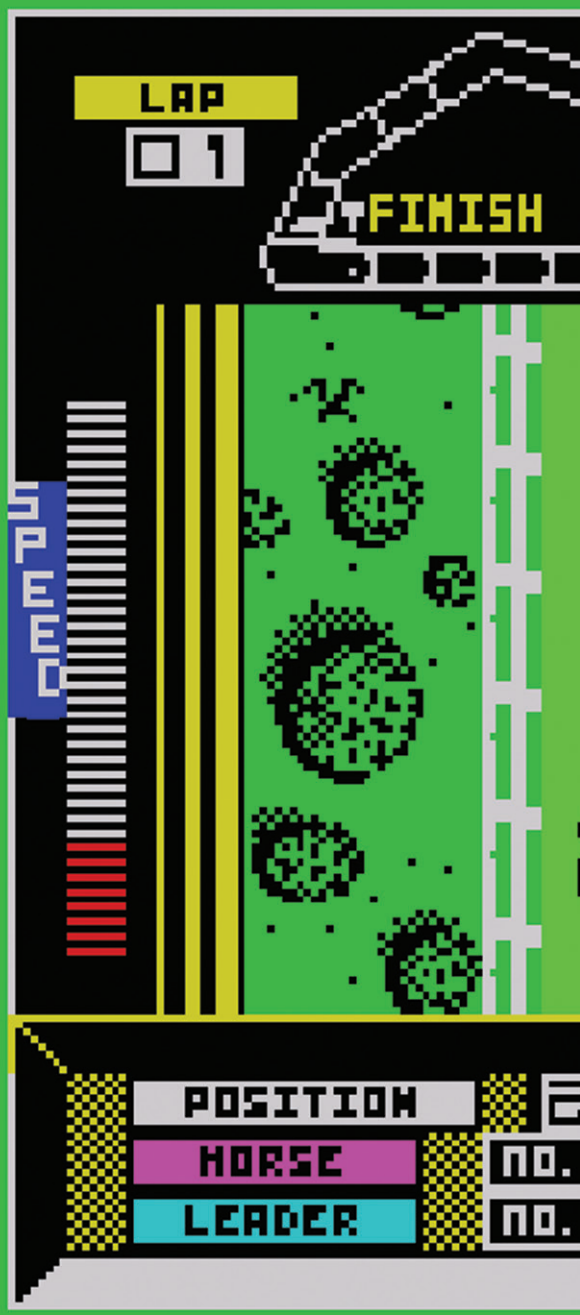
Name	:	Robin of the Wood
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Odin Computer Graphics
Author	:	Steve Wetherill, Paul Salmon, Andy Walker



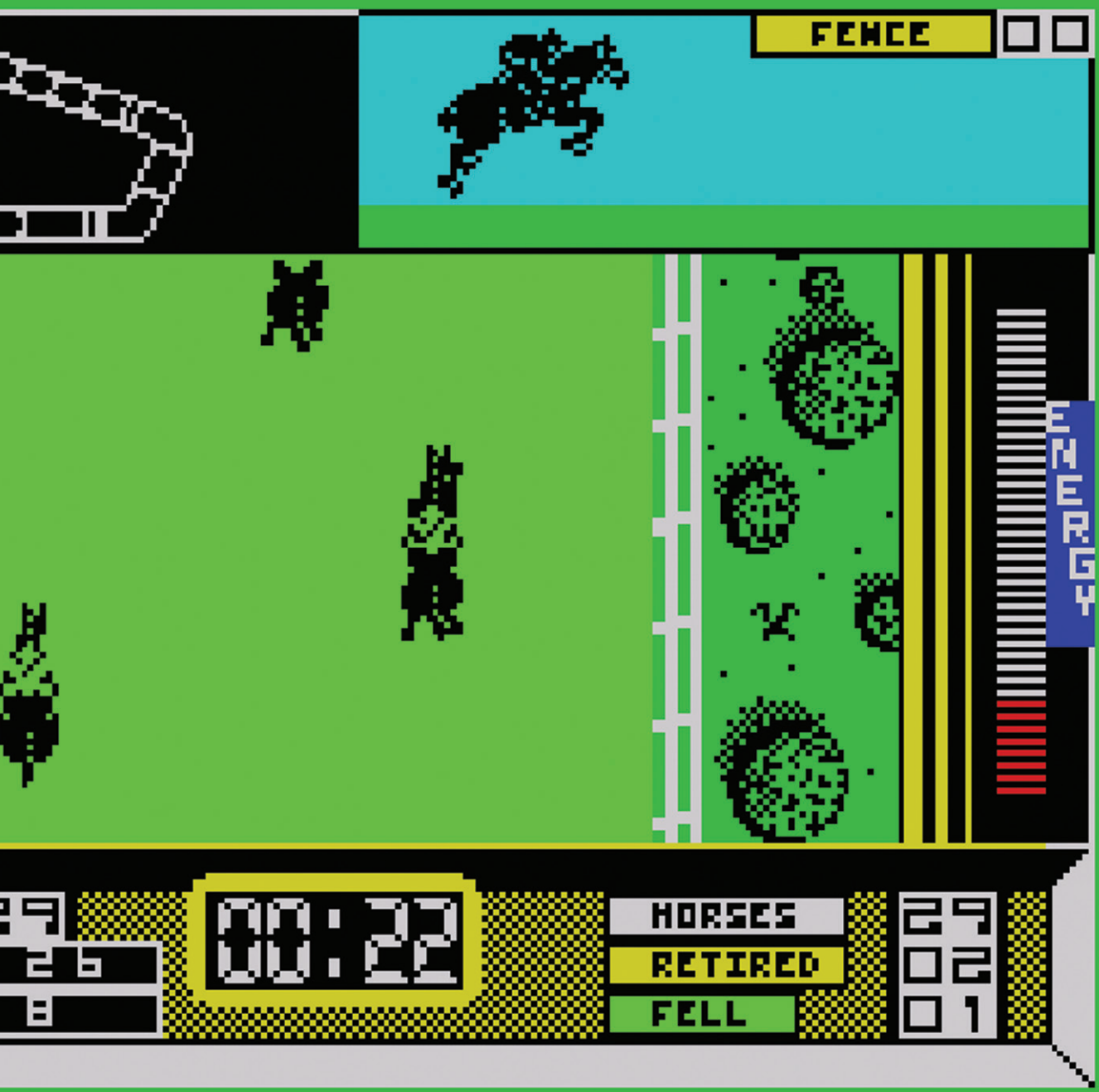
The legend of Robin Hood is so deliciously vague that it remains entirely open to any number of interpretations while still being instantly recognisable. This Spectrum game made superb use of the folklore hero, concocting its own wonderfully inventive take on Robin. In many respects this was a typical Spectrum-style adventure, requiring you to roam around finding things, and then using them on other things. But the accompanying plot made that gameplay into something special, telling a grand old tale of yore as you met rich, vibrant and often unpredictable characters on your journey to thwart the Sheriff of Nottingham. What was brilliant about its digital cast was their reaction to you. The witch, for example, would help you out if you brought her enough flowers, and send you to the dungeons if you didn't. It wasn't necessarily game over, but you had to think on your feet if you wanted to make progress. This was a long and highly engaging game that put its own mark on the Robin Hood legend forever.

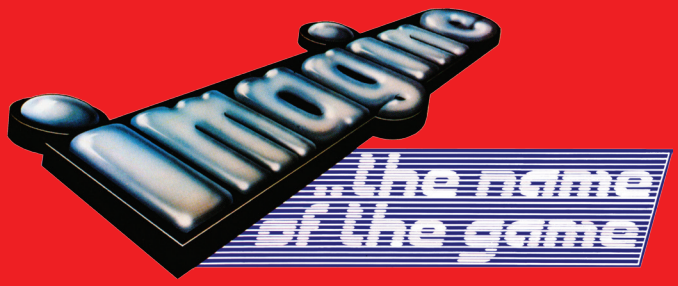


Name	:	Grand National
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Elite Systems
Author	:	Andy Williams, Paul Holmes

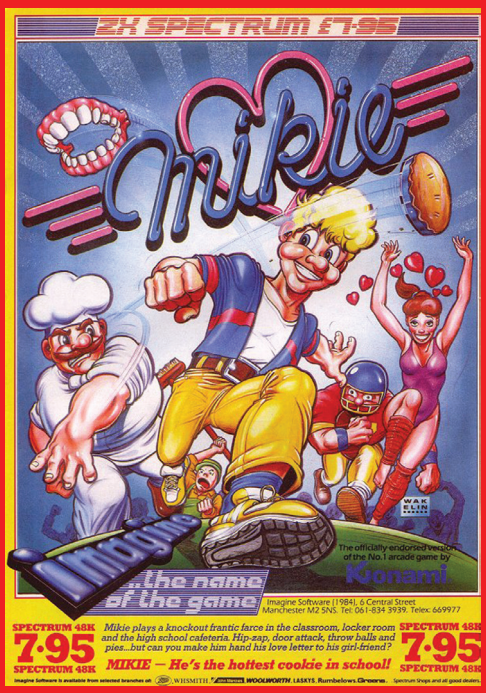


Simplistic horse racing games had appeared before *Grand National*. There was even a listing you typed in from a popular Spectrum magazine of the day that represented horses with asterisks and bets were placed on which horse crossed the finish line first. *Grand National* does go one step forward by allowing the player to pick, and then control their horse by moving left and right and adjusting the speed by using a whip, somewhat *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* style. Hedges and other horses have to be negotiated, as the aim of the game is to get 'Shergar' to the finish line first and take the winning takings before wearing out his hide with all the whipping. Graphically, the game is the best looking horse racing game on the Spectrum – but as is often the case with Elite games (*Fall Guy*, *Airwolf* etc) there is not much of a game here once you look under the glossy exterior.



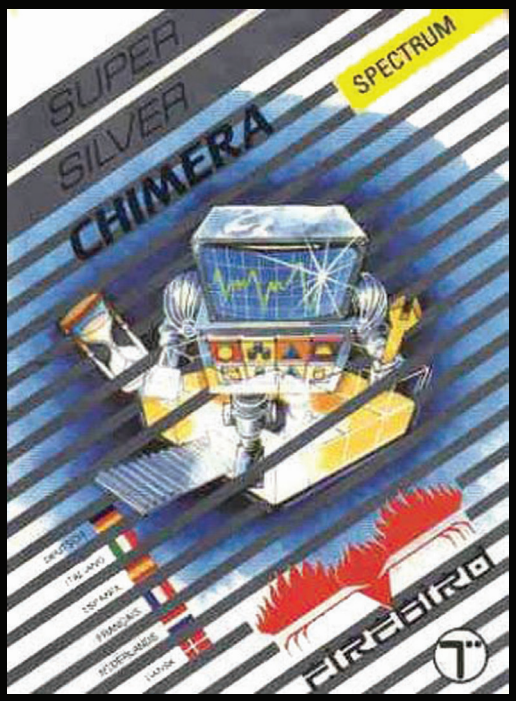


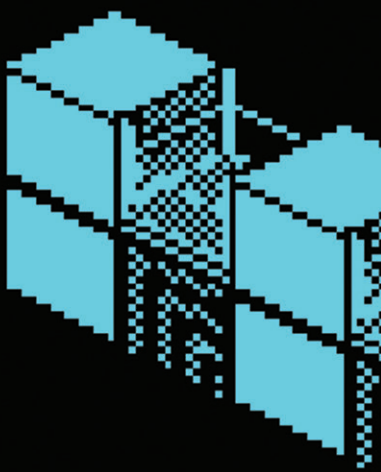
Name	:	Mikie
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Imagine Software
Author	:	Jonathan M. Smith, Martin Galway, F. David Thorpe

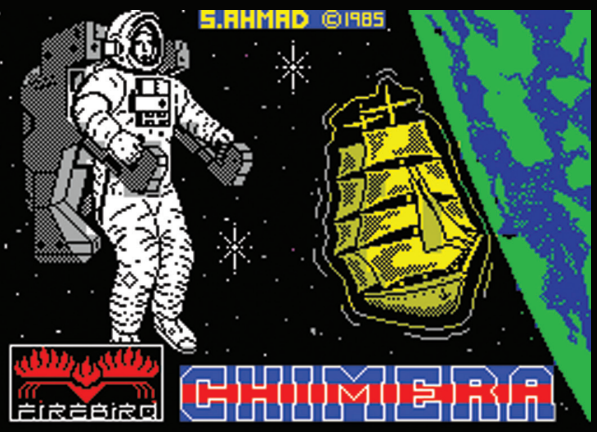


It's back to your adolescent teenage years and back to school where you play Mikie, a young tearaway who has no respect for his teachers and is so headstrong that when he wants to do something he makes sure he goes ahead and does it, no matter who is standing in his way (I'm sure everyone knows someone like this!). So sitting in class one day thinking about playing the latest Spectrum blockbuster game, Mikie decides he wants to get a note to his girlfriend. Instead of waiting for break time or the end of school bell he jumps up from his desk and makes a beeline for the schoolyard. He then realises he has to collect the hearts his classmates are sitting on for the classroom door to be unlocked. The teacher also has something to say about his escape and chases him around the room, throwing his false teeth at Mikie when beyond annoyed. It's then on to the locker room, gymnasium and ultimately to the playground where all the collected hearts are given to his girl. With Mikie being a happy bunny, he then returns to the classroom and stays there until his next spontaneous adventure.

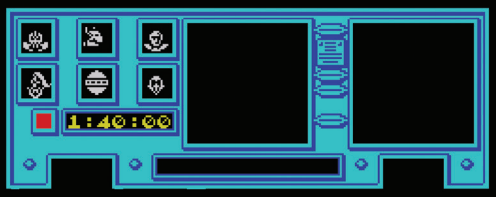
NAME : Chimera
YEAR : 1985
COMPANY : Firebird
AUTHOR : Shahid Ahmad





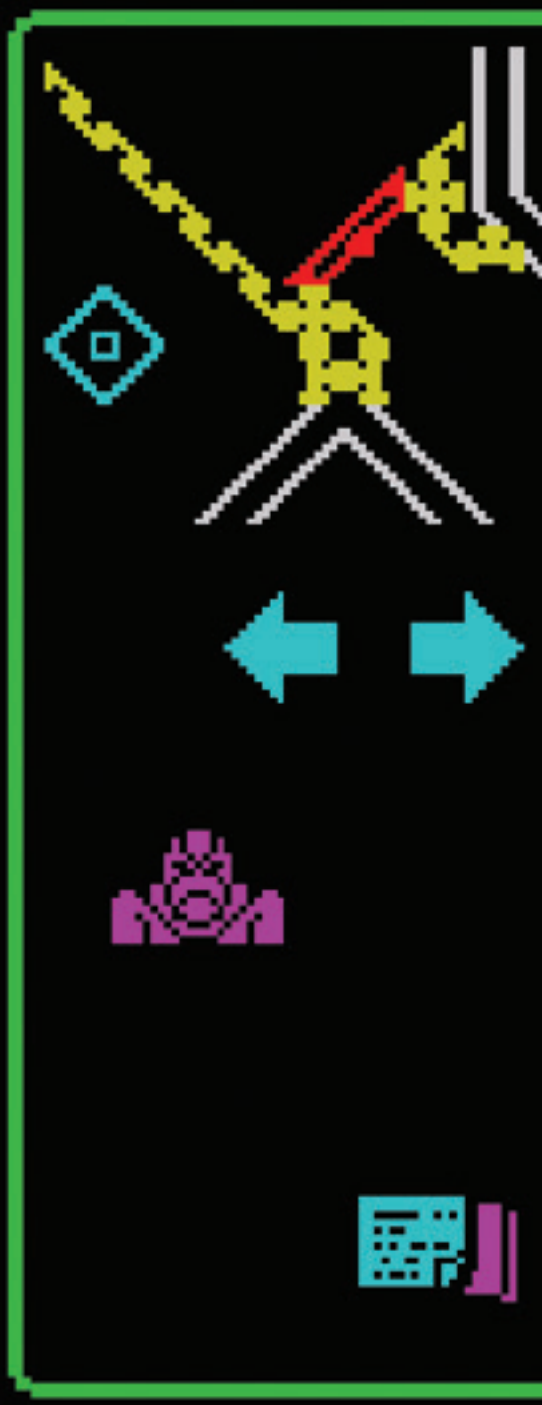


As is often the case when aliens discover our small planet, they want to destroy us. In Firebird's *Chimera*; a robot is snuck on board an attacking alien spaceship to try and activate its self destruct mechanism and save mankind. Naturally, the player is at the controls of the cash machine-alike hero. His adventure takes place in an isometric landscape of many different rooms, all set out on an eight-by-eight grid. Admittedly the controls are kind of awkward as you search for items to use in accessing the more volatile areas of the ship and assembling four warheads. But there is a tremendously ominous atmosphere, as you attempt to complete the mission before your resources run dry, and that gives *Chimera* a dark, sci-fi lilt that appeals to disenchanted gamers now and of the day. And if you persevere, and make it to the end, you are rewarded with a bonus *Space Invaders*-like game that is even more fun than *Chimera* itself.

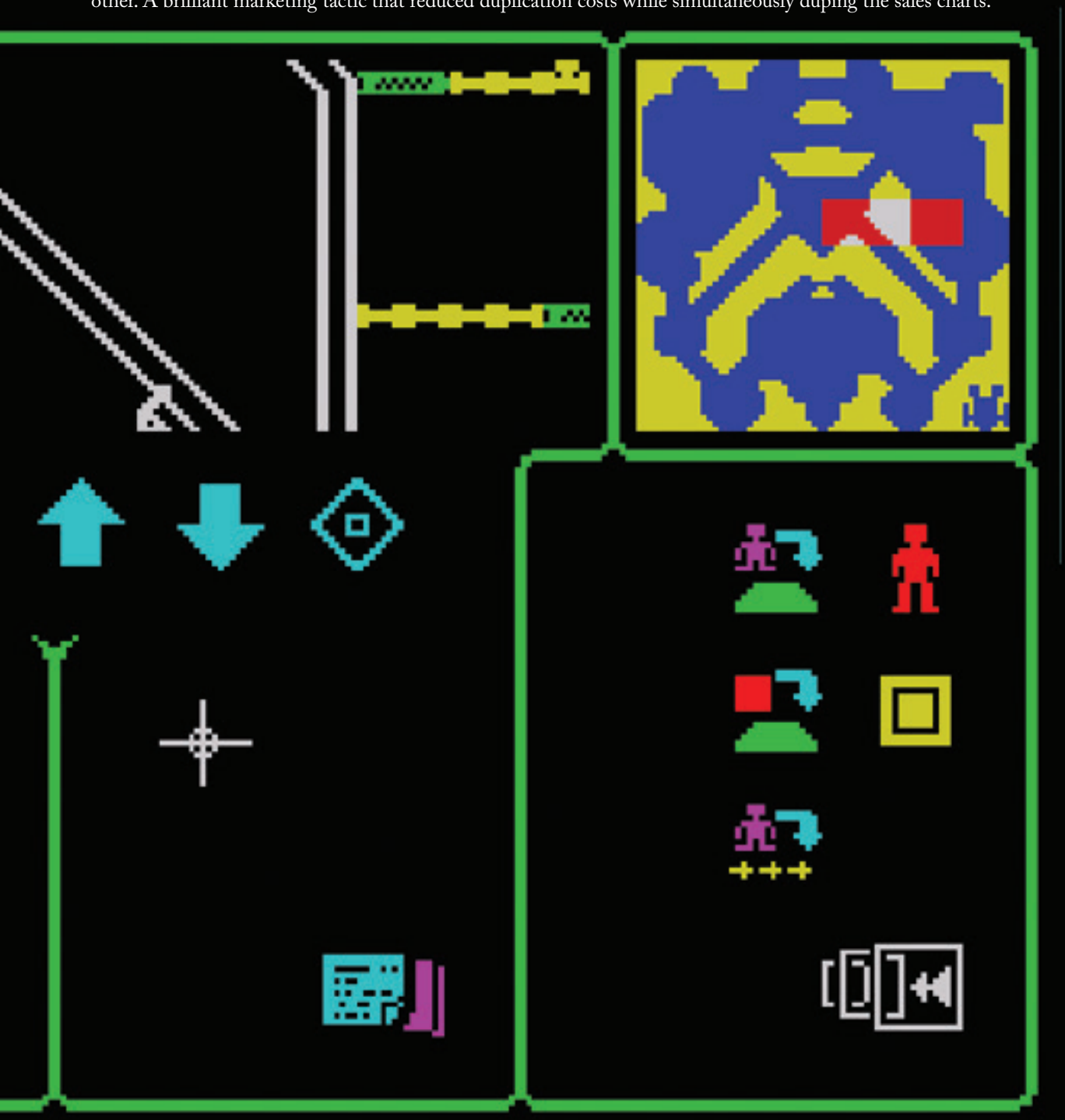


Name	:	Shadowfire
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Beyond Software
Author	:	John Heap, Simon Butler, Steve Cain

by
DENTON DESIGNS

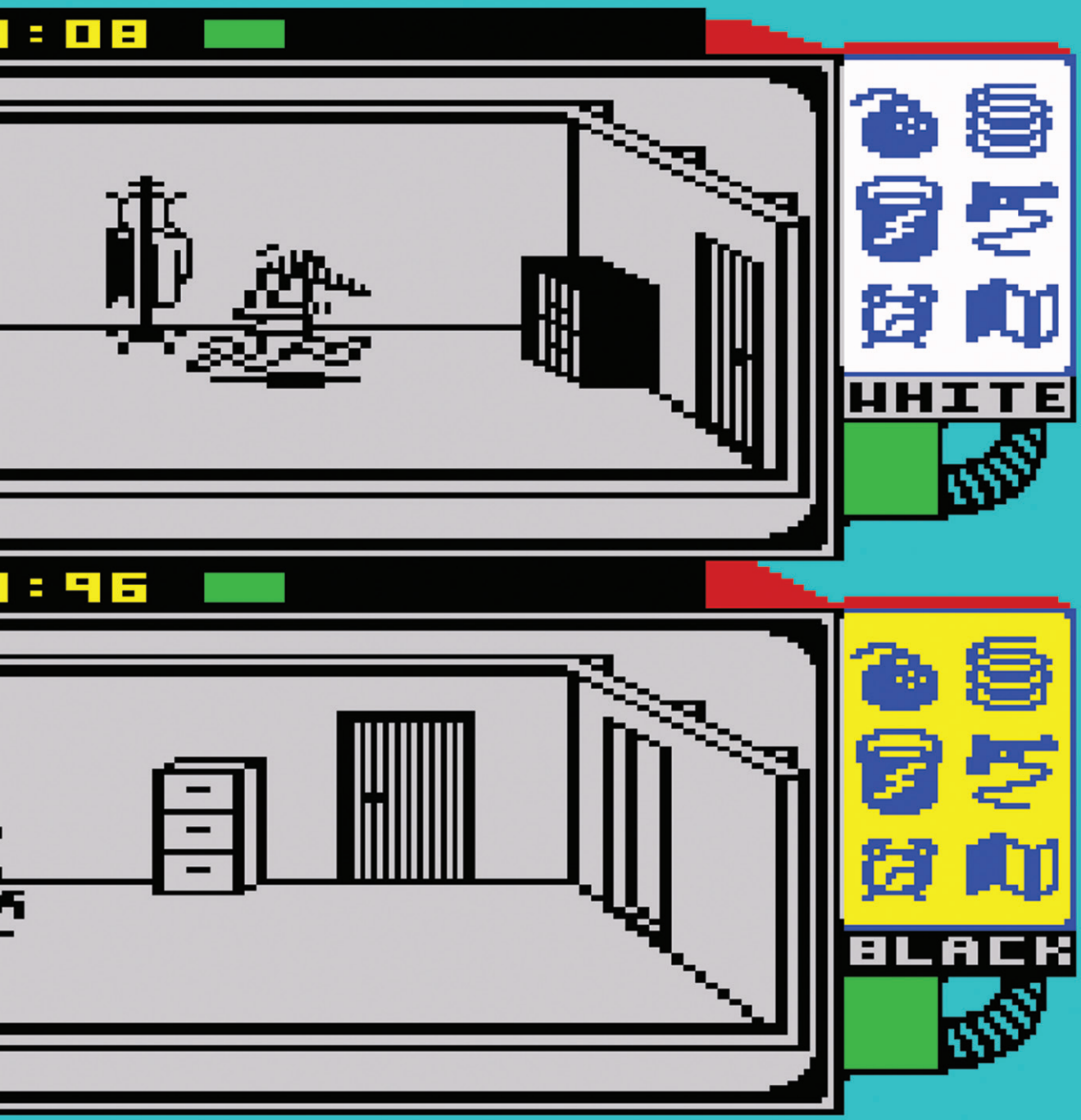


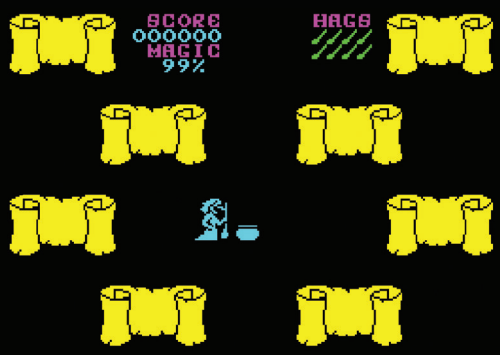
There's no better way to build drama in a hot action story than to throw together a mish-mash of personalities and send them into a desperate situation together. Easily accomplished in most any other medium, but the Spectrum wasn't really equipped to put six very different, playable characters into one game. Not until *Shadowfire* came along, anyway. This was the first game to employ an ingenious menu and icon-driven control method, that made it entirely possible for players to command this dangerous, rag-tag team of soldiers, criminals and sophisticated robots at once. The screen was split up into six sections that allowed you access to your inventories, control systems and other displays that changed depending upon the circumstances. This was all seamlessly woven around an epic science fiction tale. A real-world timer of one hour and forty minutes lit a fire under players as they raced to recover a kidnapped ambassador. Also of interest is how the tape contained the Spectrum version on one side, and the C64 version on the other. A brilliant marketing tactic that reduced duplication costs while simultaneously duping the sales charts.



Name	:	Spy vs Spy
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Beyond Sofyware
Author	:	Incentive Software Ltd (Tag, The Kid)

An important game for various reasons. Spec-chums had to wait a long time to get their hands on this superb game, which had materialised on the 'Commodore 64' quite some time before, to rave reviews. This was also a generation's introduction to the wonderful work of comic artist Prohías, and his most infamous, hilarious creation. In single player mode you took on the role of the white spy, whose only objective was to exit the building, make for the waiting airplane, and escape before the other guy. It was a world of savage espionage that you were thrown into however, and you needed four items before the door was unlocked, along with a briefcase to carry them in. A split-screen view was used, allowing for free-roaming even in a two-player game. Searching for objects was only possible when you were alone, so you could fight the other guy when you came face to face, or run. If you won a fight, you bagged his goodies, so it was a strategic decision every time it came to fight or flight.





Name : The Hobbit

Name : Cauldron

Year : 1985

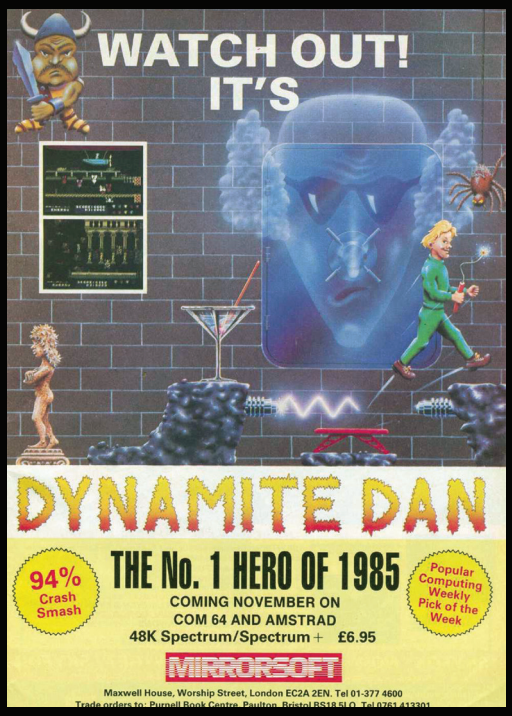
Publisher : Palace Software

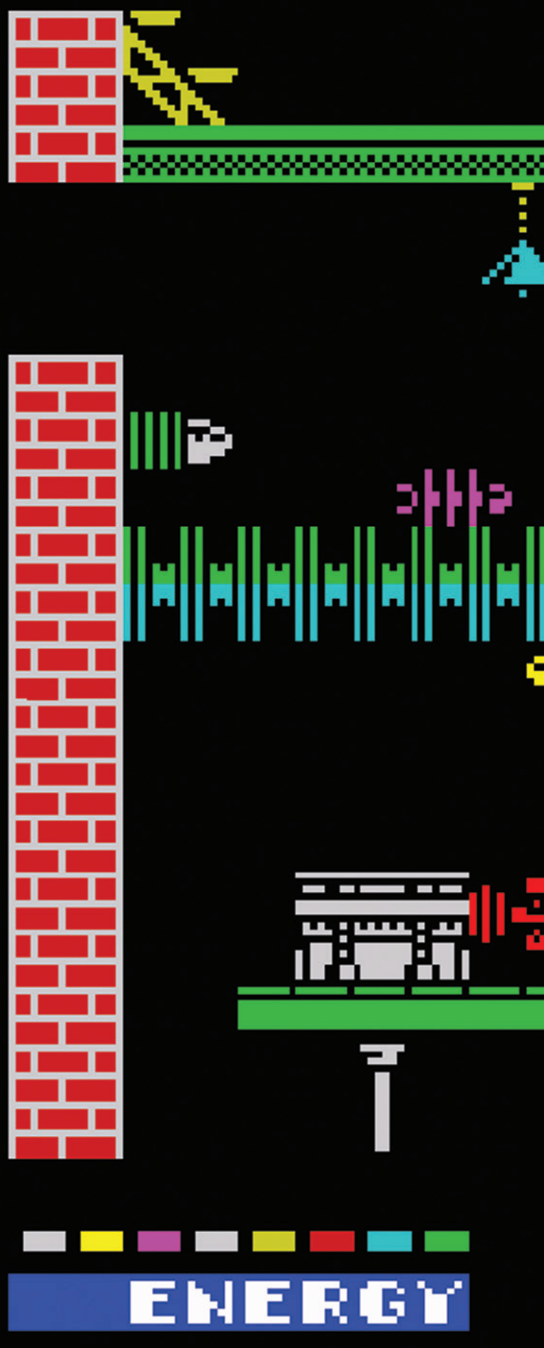
Author : Tony Barber, Simon Dunstan, Steve Brown

Cauldron is an early game from Palace Software and one of the games that made its name, along with its superior sequel. Playing the part of a witch, desperately searching the landscape for parts of a spell, it represents a serious challenge for any gamer as the warted one attempts to rid the land of the dreaded pumpkin. Above ground the witch travels by flying broomstick (of course) but she is far from safe in the skies; bats, pumpkins and carnivorous plants all threaten to sap her energy. She must locate various coloured keys which open corresponding doors. Once past a door and underground, the game turns into a platformer as the witch makes her way to the required spell ingredient. *Cauldron* is a colourful and attractive game that became a good seller for Palace, but is just a little too tough and frustrating to be considered a true classic.

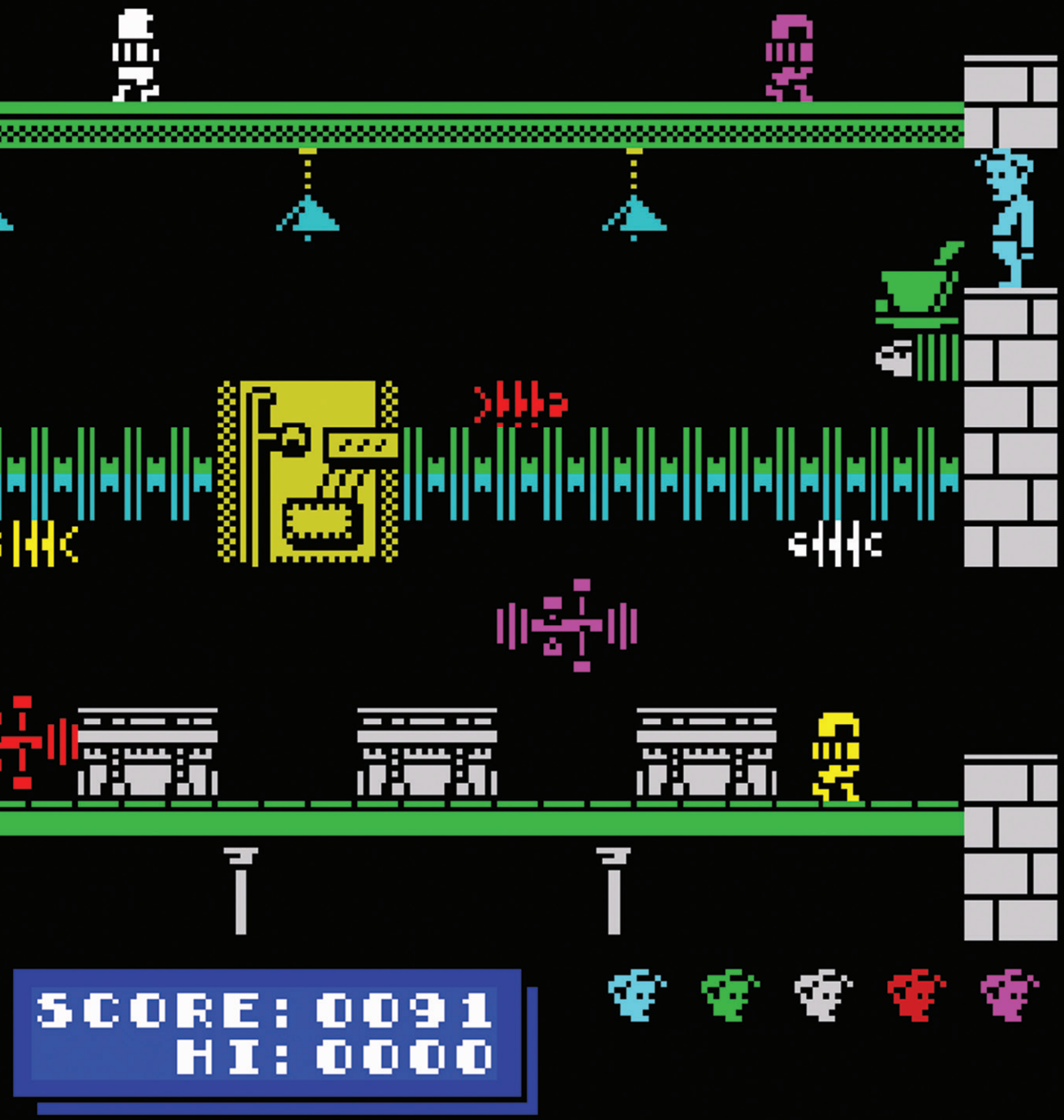
MIRRORSOFT

Name	:	Dynamite Dan
Year	:	1985
Publisher	:	Mirrorsoft
Author	:	Rod Bowkett





Here we find another *Jet Set Willy* inspired clone that itself suffered greatly in the charts due to the popularity of Matthew Smith's title. *Dynamite Dan*, though clearly inspired by the mad brain of Smith, veers back to normality with recognisable enemies and staple gameplay. The game is a technicolor fest with bright, large colourful enemies marching back and forth on each room across a given path (typical of these types of arcade adventures). The storyline is familiar – a damsel in distress is in need of rescuing after being kidnapped by the evil Dr. Blitzen (insert Christmas joke here!) and eight sticks of dynamite need to be located to complete the quest and save the girl. With a nod and a wink to the Bond film of '85, *Dynamite Dan* offers more of the same to *Jet Set Willy* fans with an added twist of originality, tougher gameplay and a far more believable place of domicile, even though cylindrical in nature with the rooms at either far side connected.



DURELL

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* TURBO ESPRIT MENU *

1    ALTER SKILL (1)
2    ALTER PLAYING KEYS
3    VIEW SCORE TABLE
4    VIEW PENALTY TABLE
5    SAVE SCORE TABLES
6    LOAD SCORE TABLES
7    PRACTICE
8    PLAY

   ENTER 1 TO 8
```

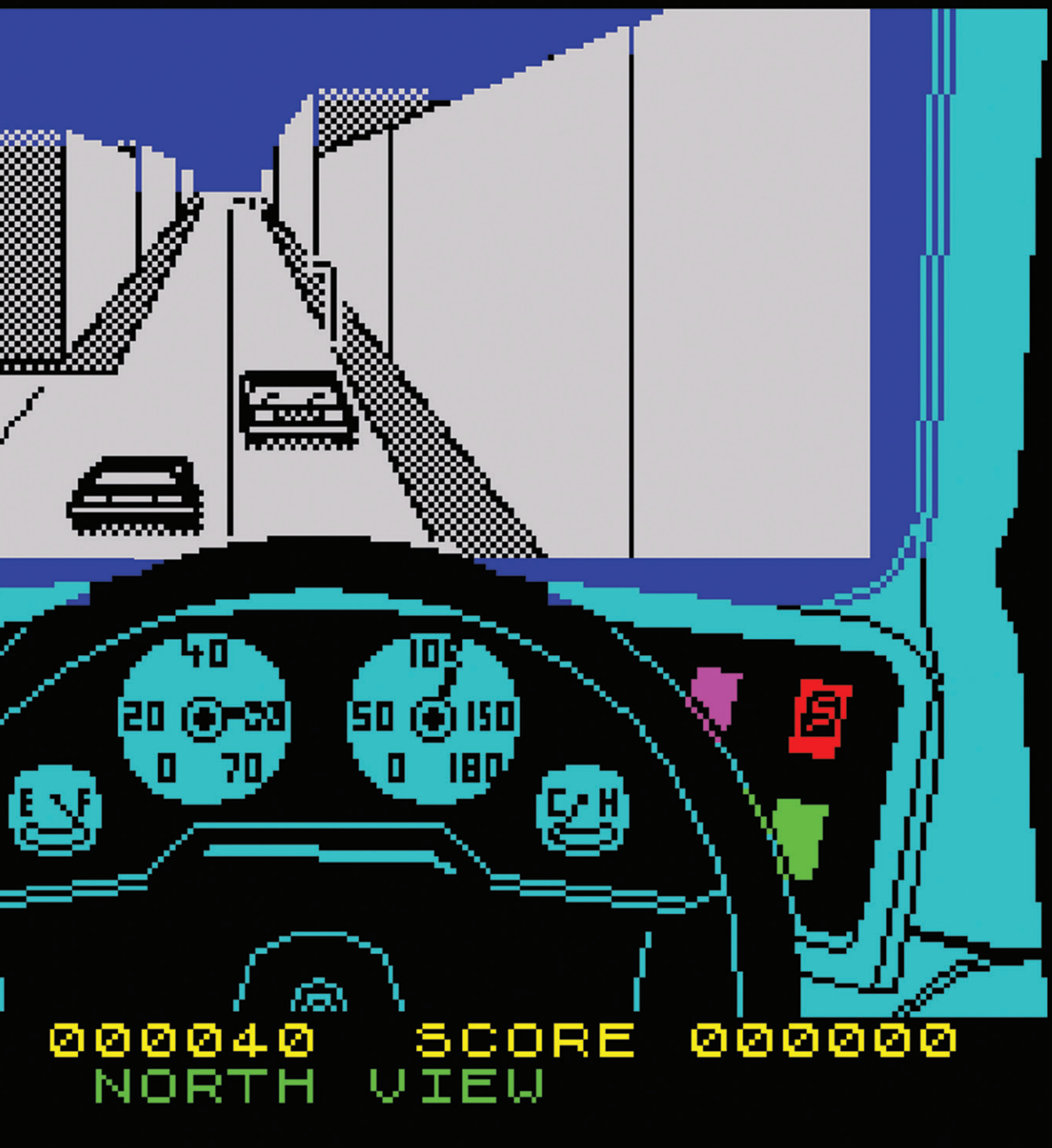
Name	:	Turbo Esprit
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Durell
Author	:	Mike A. Richardson, Dave Cummings

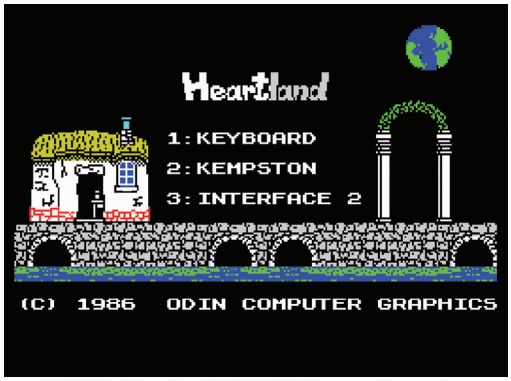
turbo esprit

DURELL
© 1986

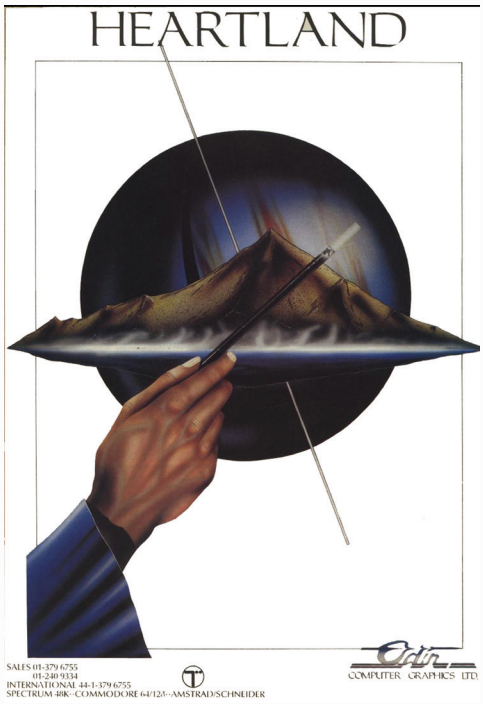
BY MIKE RICHARDSON.

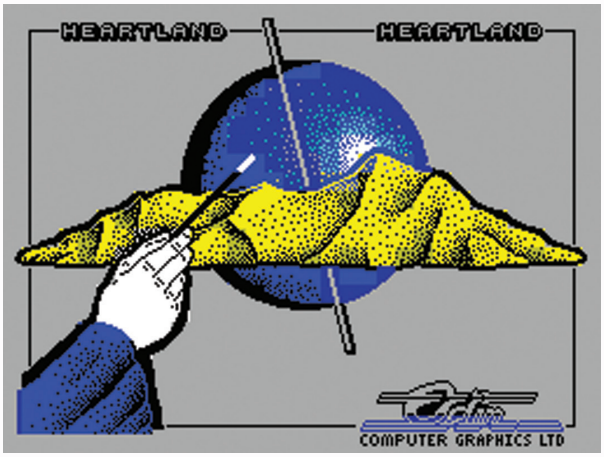
Turbo Esprit is one of several excellent games from Durell's Mike Richardson and is often praised as one of the first true open-world games, and a forebear to hits such as *Grand Theft Auto*. Playing some type of law enforcer, the player zooms around four different cities, avoiding innocent motorists, obeying traffic signals and stopping for pedestrians crossing the road. While doing this you must also chase and apprehend a band of smugglers who are meeting at various points across the city. Capturing them alive (by 'bumping' their cars) gains an extra bonus, although they can be destroyed by shooting them, which gives less points but is much more satisfying. The real thrill to *Turbo Esprit* is the feeling that you are driving in a real, living, breathing city. Its stark black and white buildings overshadow events in the streets below, lending the game an effective atmosphere of urban depression. The title car controls very niftily too, making exciting turns and high speed chases a real thrill. Undoubtedly a Spectrum classic. Just don't forget to stop for gas!

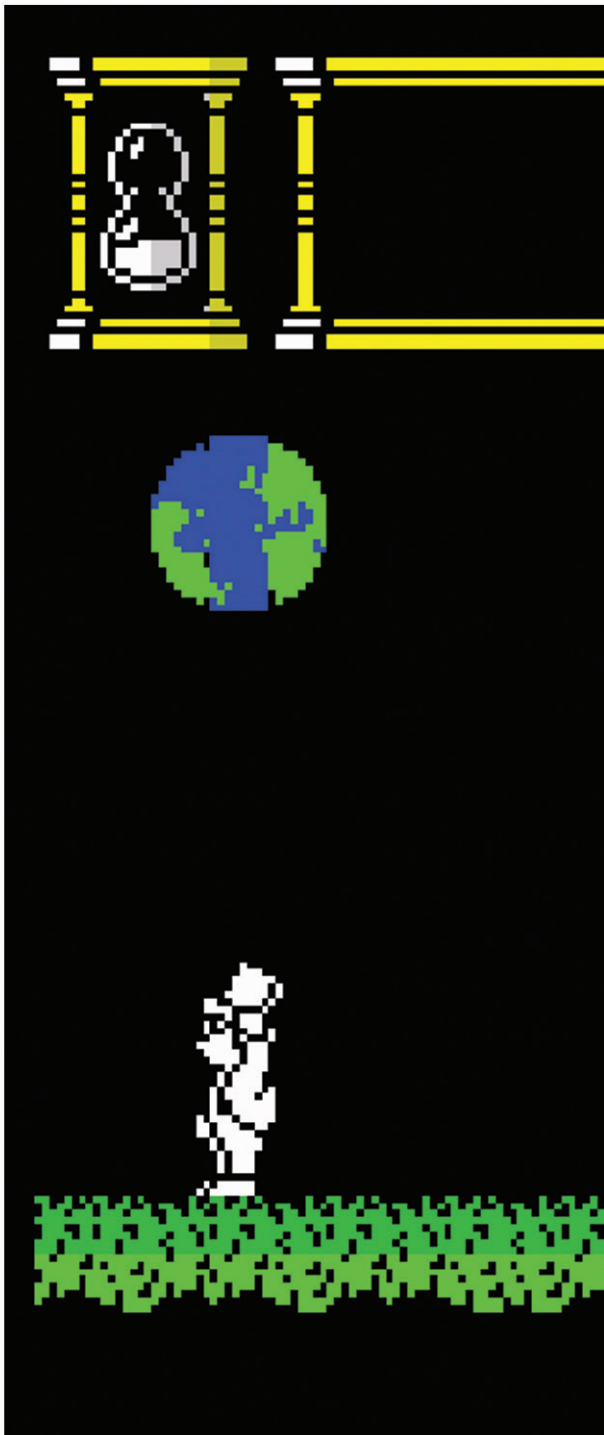




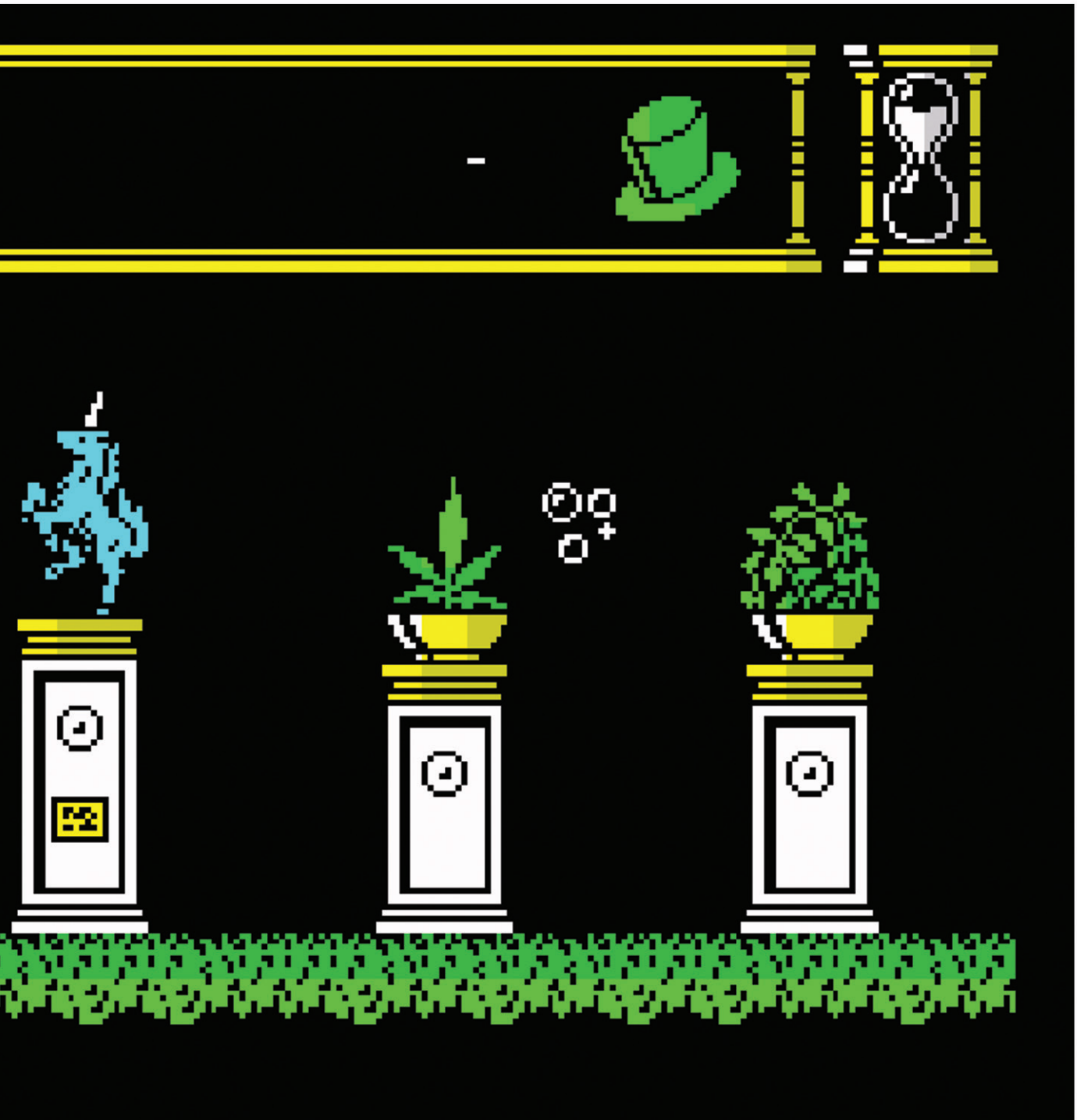
Name	:	Heartland
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Odin Computer Graphics
Author	:	Steve Wetherill, Colin Grunes, Keith Tinman

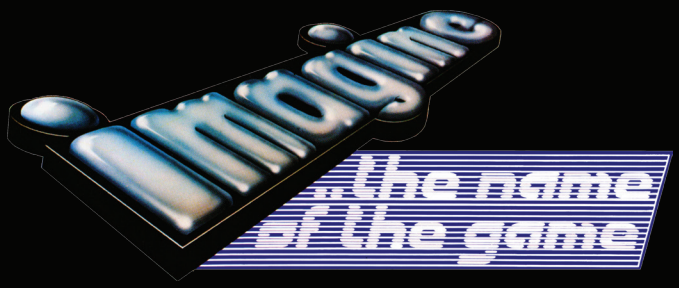




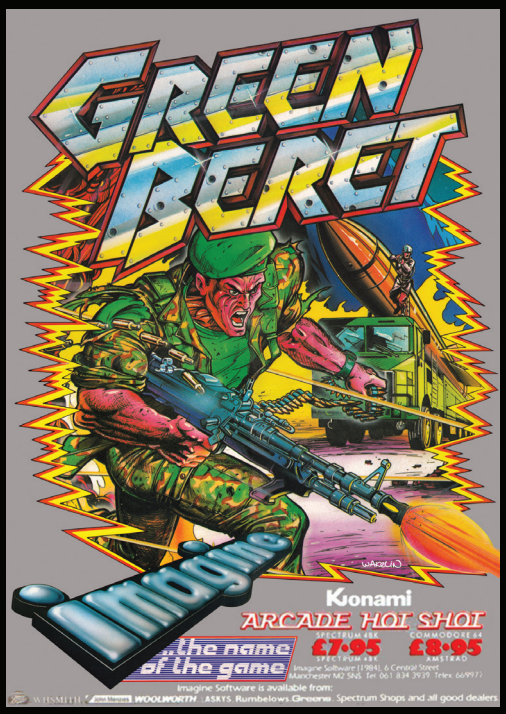


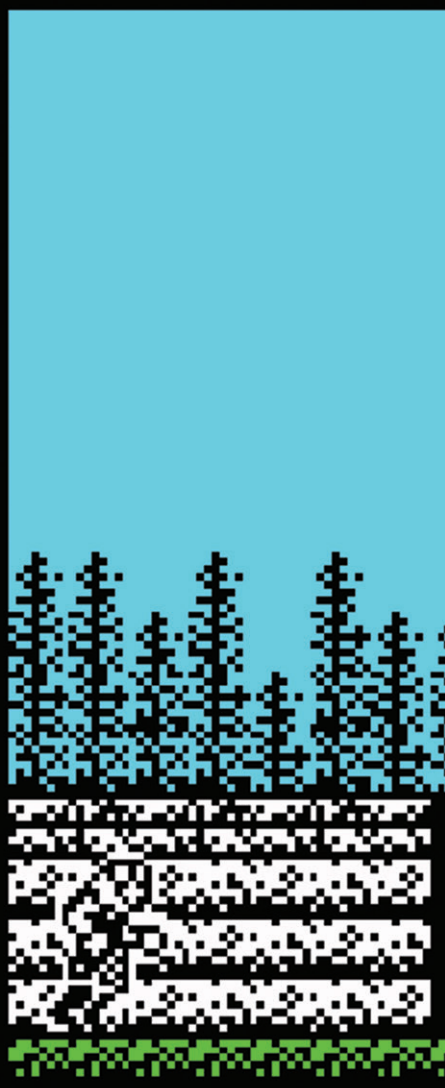
If there was one type of game the Spectrum excelled at, it was folklore-rich exploration. Which it probably isn't. But you know the kind of thing. *Dizzy*, *Alchemist*, *Jet Set Willy* and *Nodes of Yesod*. And, yes of course, *Heartland*. Here players were cast in something of an Alice Through the Looking Glass alternative, in which the Mad Hatter took centre stage and set off on the kind of quest that only his tea-boiled brain could comprehend. That said, the objective was pretty simple. Find six missing pages of the magic tome, and destroy the six evil pages that have been created to confuse matters. Large, lush visuals brought *Heartland* to life, with diverse level designs that took you not only from east coast to west, but in and out of the screen through doorways, lifts and exotic locations aplenty. Its dreamlike qualities, such as whipping your top hat at enemies to dispatch them, gave it a very welcoming and adventurous atmosphere that elevated it above a typical explore-'em-up and into a mythology all of its own.





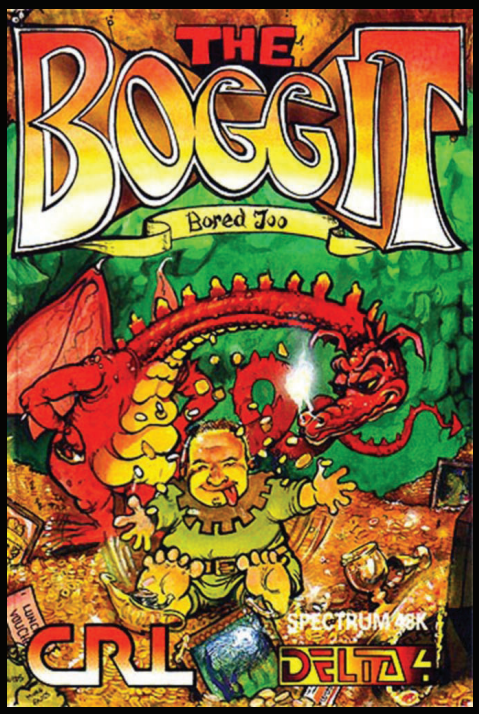
Name	:	Green Beret
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Imagine Software
Author	:	Jonathan M. Smith, F. David Thorpe

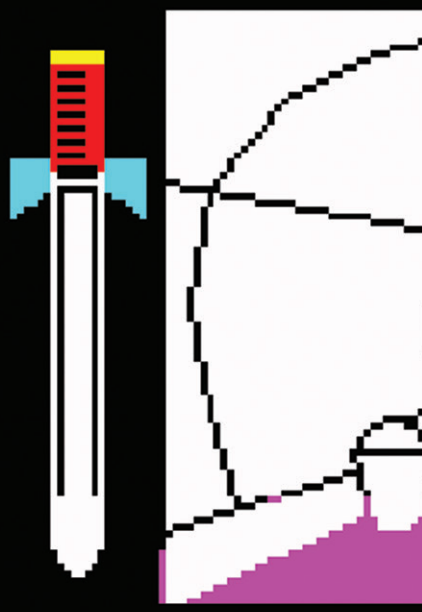




Green Beret is one of those Spectrum arcade conversions that is still today spoken of in hushed tones of excited praise. It's also coded by Jonathan Smith who sadly passed away in 2012. The game's premise is simple: proceed from left to right as the soldier of the title, stabbing enemies with your knife, or taking out several at once with the flame thrower or missile launcher. There are four stages, with your destination the prison camp and captured comrades; but first you must negotiate the missile base, harbour and bridge, all of which contain a mass of enemies varying from high-kicking experts (a jump is needed to eliminate them), armed soldiers and regular grunts. The key to *Green Beret* is its playability. The main character moves well and responds to the slightest key stroke, which is vital for a game that requires sharp reflexes. Stabbing enemies is huge fun and it remains today a considerable, but not unbeatable challenge. Nevertheless, to make the final level and free your imprisoned colleagues you have to be at the very top of your game.

Name	:	The Boggit
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	CRL
Author	:	Judith Child, Fergus McNeill





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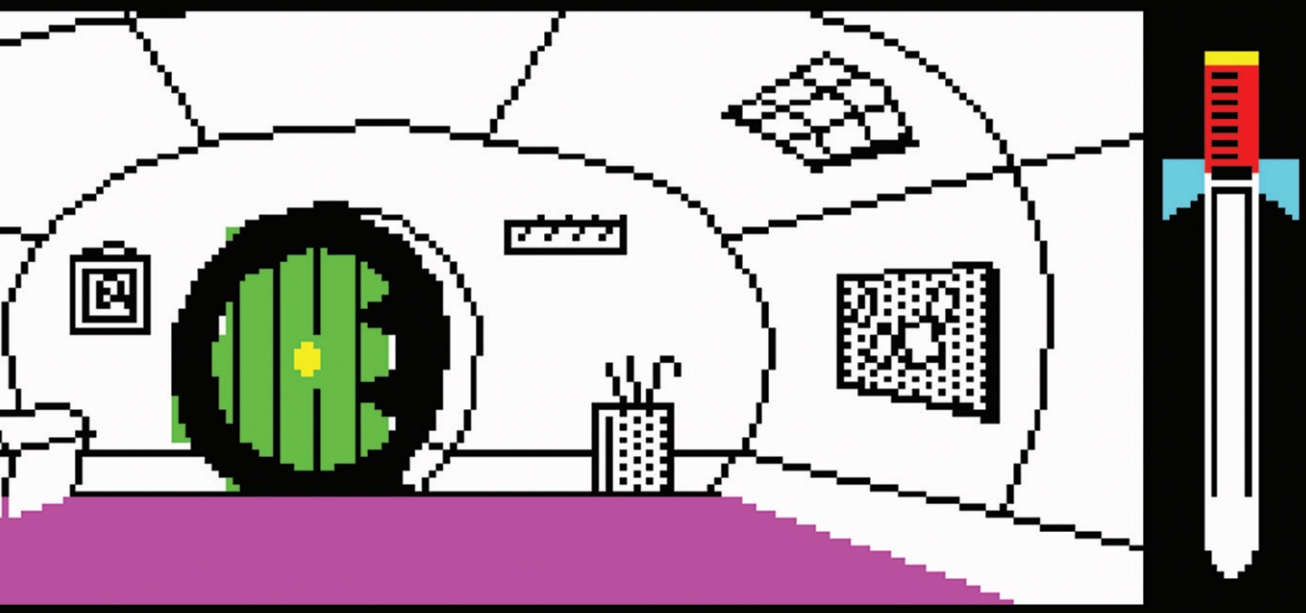
If there was one thing that both Spectrum users and developers loved, it was making fun of… well, everyone and everything that wasn't them, or a Spectrum. Parodies were rife, and unforgiving, including the hilariously scathing text adventure *Bored of the Rings*, which was quickly followed by T*he Boggit: Bored Too*. This graphically supported text adventure took a knife to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* by requiring players to help Bimbo Faggins and Grandalf to shore up cash, solve puzzles and eventually make their way onto a TV quiz show. Just because it was lampooning a literary cultural treasure that was an immensely popular text adventure at the time, *The Boggit* was still incredibly well written, drawing upon pop culture of the day to deliver a story that was rife with great jokes that never pulled their punches, and puzzles that were worthy of any text adventure that had come before it. Even the maps and songs that litter Tolkien's books were recreated with sarcastic confidence, making *The Boggit* every bit as entertaining as the butt of its many, many jokes.



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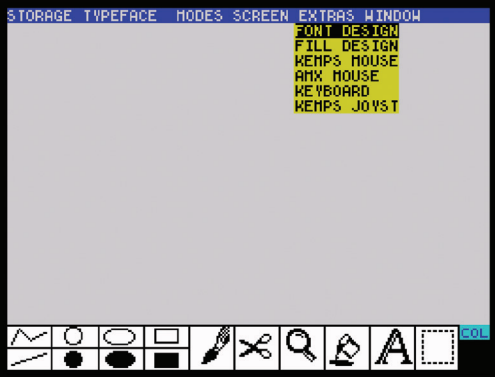
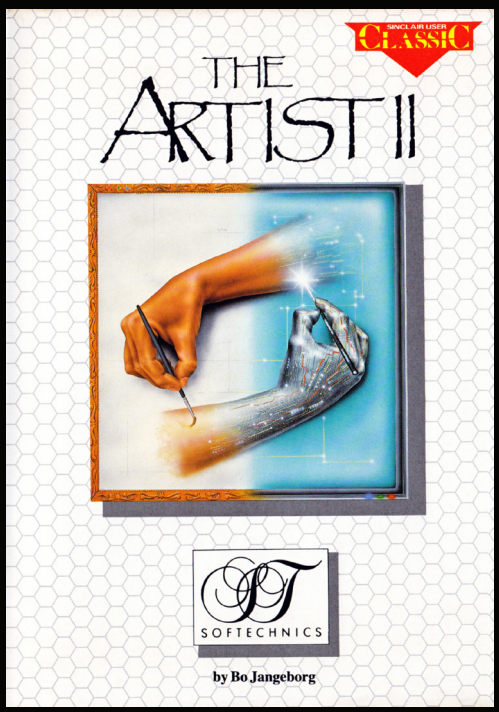
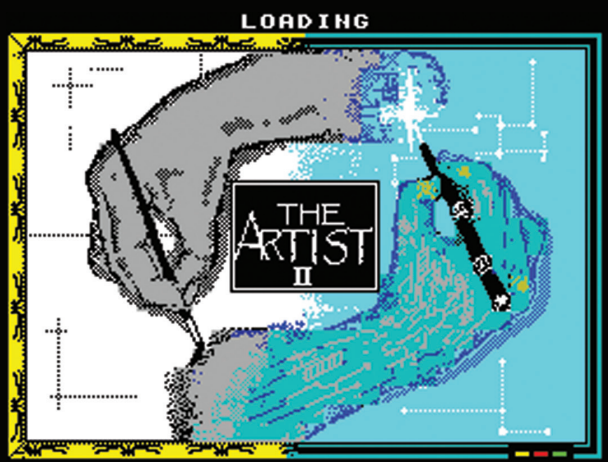
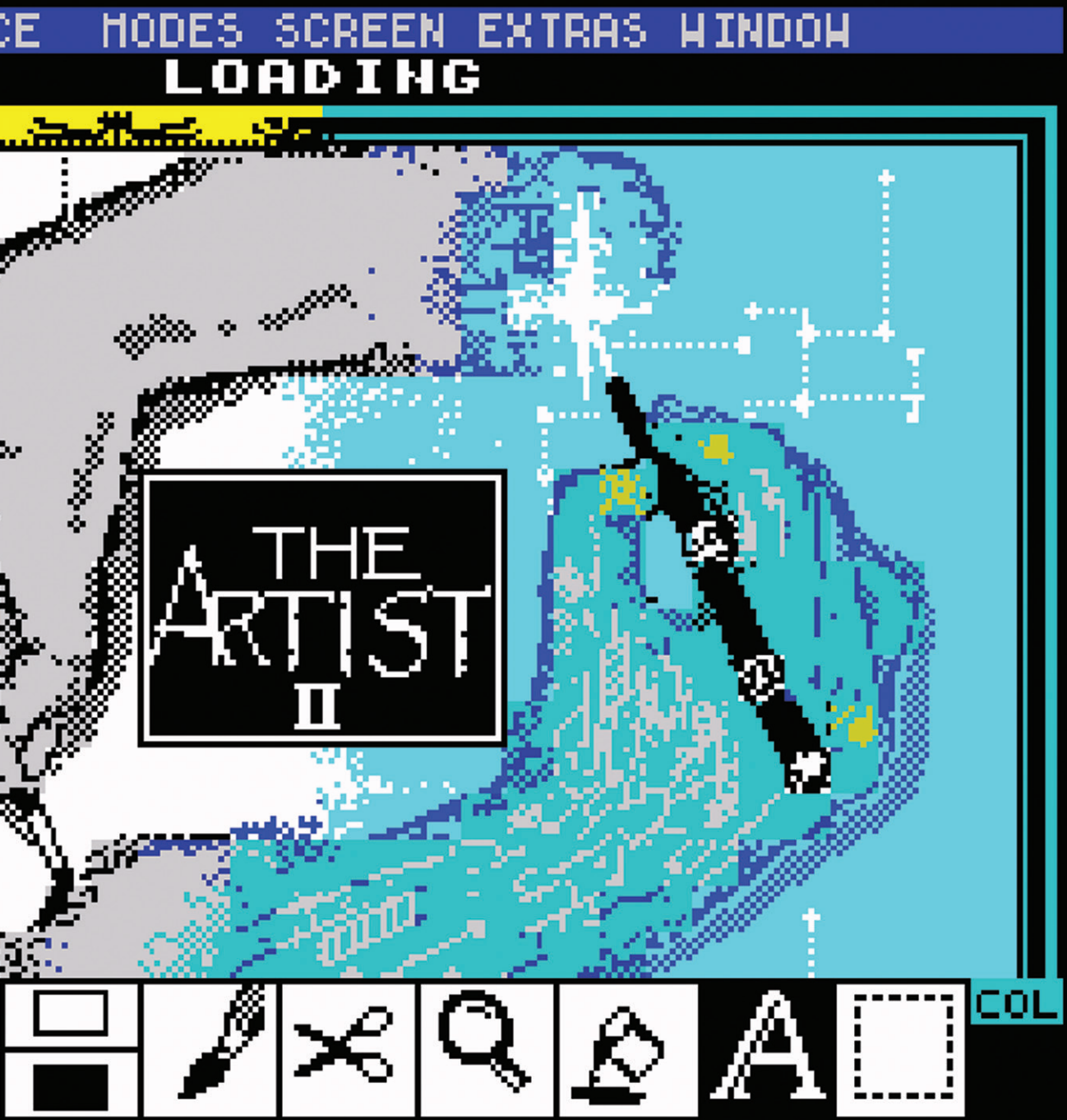


Name : The Artist II
Year : 1986
Publisher : Softechnics
Author : Bo Jangeborg

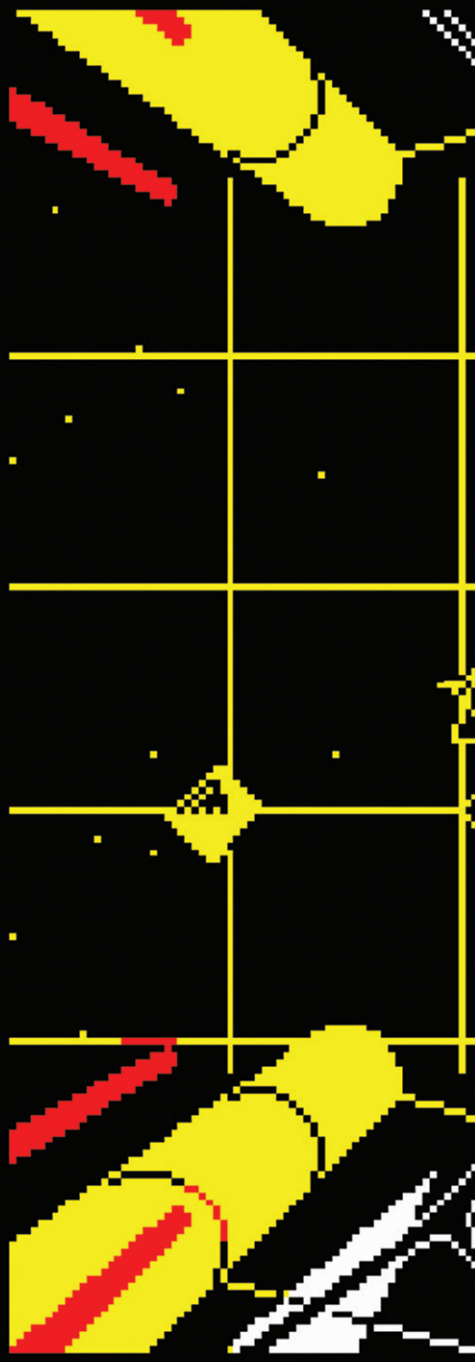




By 1986 we were beginning to realise that home computers like the Spectrum could offer more than just gaming. Okay, so few of these machines were originally made just to be games platforms, but that's what brought them into our living rooms in the first place. As the mouse began to gain popularity as an input device, software like *The Artist II* began to look a lot more appealing. And this one rapidly became the market leader for creating works of digital art on the Spectrum. Not only was it a powerful graphics package, but the developer understood the importance of engaging coders as well as home users. It was compatible with the Microdrive and Opus disk drive, as well as the standard cassette recorder. Those who knew their way around BASIC were even able to customise the way *The Artist II* worked. Both a Kempston and AMX mouse could be used, and in a pinch the keyboard and joystick could be employed as digital paint brushes. Even early printers were supported, allowing *The Artist II* to usher in a new age in computer art.

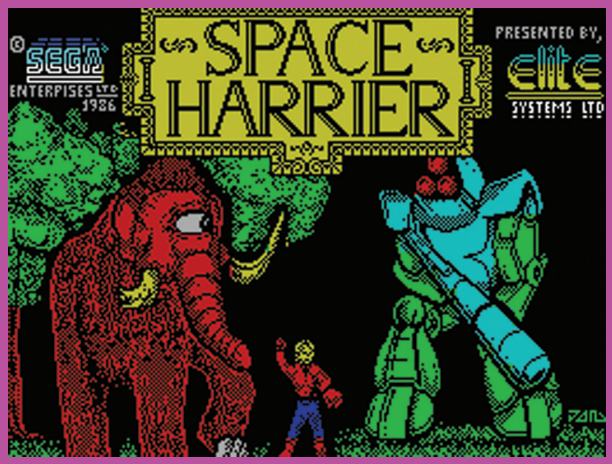


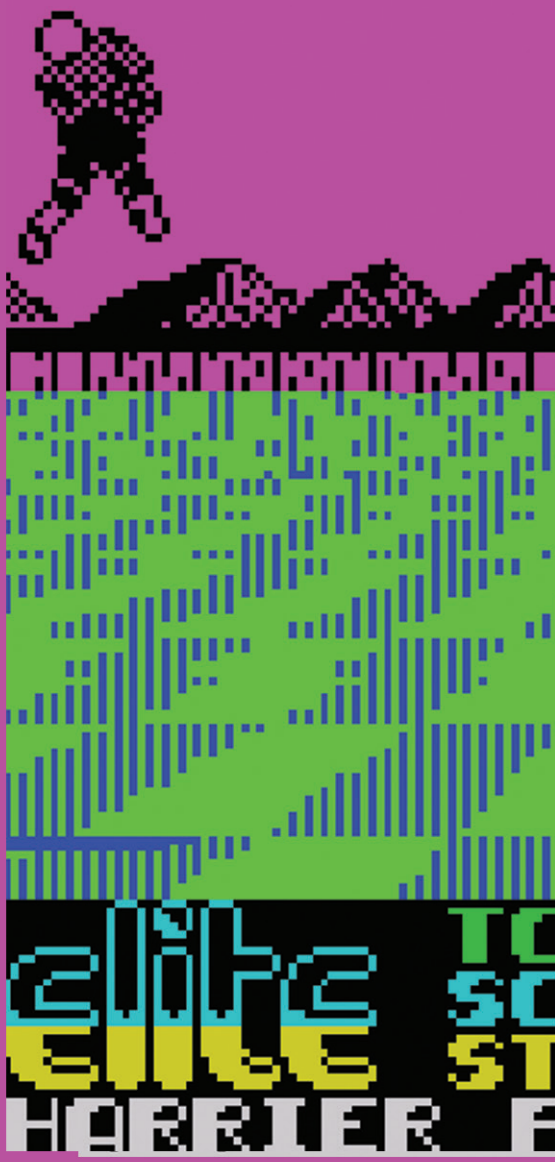
Name	:	Starstrike II
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Realtime Games
Author	:	Ian Oliver, Graeme Baird



While Realtime's *3D Starstrike* was an impressive game that more than echoed the famous *Star Wars* coin-op, it was with this sequel two years later that the developer really broke the mould. Playing an attacking federation force, launching a pre-emptive attack against the aliens from the first game, *Starstrike II* presents 22 planets of varying strength that each have to be visited and its respective control system knocked out. What sets this sequel apart are the stunning 3D vector graphics – now complete with shading, much to the astonishment of gamers and reviewers at the time. The game plays in several sections as the player must first select a system to attack, before warping through a gate and proceeding to the surface, under attack from enemy fighters, naturally. Then comes a ventilation duct similar to the trench sequence from the first game, before you finally get a chance to destroy the control centre in the final stage. *Starstrike II* is a great space shooter, and an amazing achievement squeezed into just 48K.

Name	:	Space Harrier
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Elite Systems
Author	:	Keith Burkhill, Jon Harrison

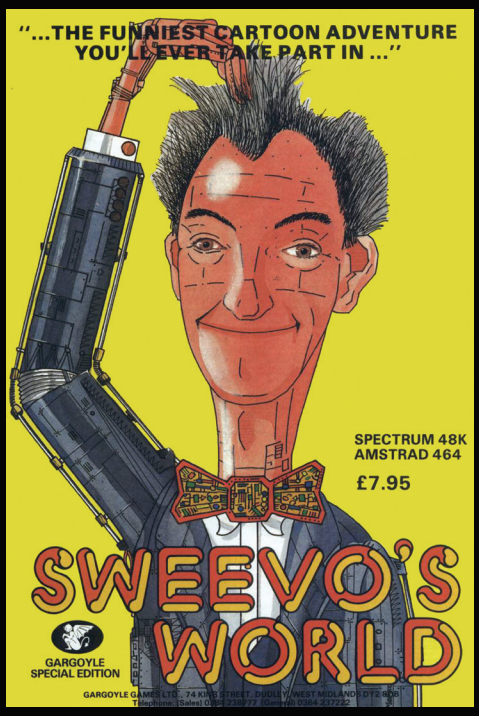




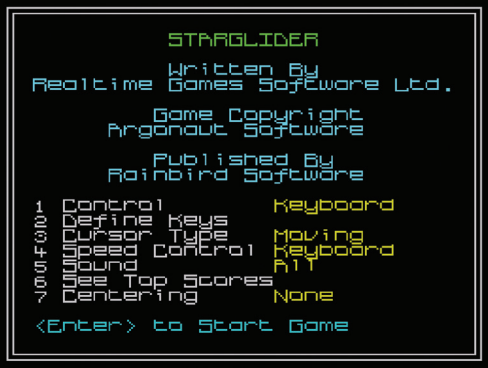
For a brief, wonderful summer, the seafronts of Britain thundered with the iconic sounds of *Space Harrier* arcade machines. The hero's deep and lamentable death knell, the thumping soundtrack, the onslaught of futuristic weapons fire and the coin-op's irresistible call to action of "Get ready!" were a symphony of digital excess that delighted our game-addled brains. All of which made this a significant home conversion. The slightest failure in its adaptation would kill it dead. Fortunately Elite Systems triumphed, and the Spectrum was awarded one of its most pixel perfect and fastest conversions ever seen. The rolling, winding chequered floor was fully intact, and the game – which Your Sinclair astutely observed was a megabyte (a huge, massive MEGABYTE!) of arcade RAM had been condensed into just 48K – featured everything from the original aside from its moving chair. Admittedly the complexity of its design meant you could sometimes lose your flying warrior in the maelstrom of pixels, but the joy of seeing *Space Harrier* run so beautifully on a Spectrum was second only to hearing its call from the seaside arcade.

GARGOYLE GAMES

Name	:	Sweevo's World
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Gargoyle Games
Author	:	Greg Follis, Roy Carter



Although it borrows quite heavily from *Knight Lore* in terms of graphics and design, *Sweevo's World* is very much its own game. It joined the growing number of 3D isometric adventures at exactly the right time, demonstrating just how involving and entertaining these room-flipping, puzzle-solving, object-collecting games could be. It cast players as the eponymous Sweevo (which stood for Self Willed Extreme Environment Organism, despite him being pegged as a robot) whose job it is to patrol the mad Baron Knutz's planetoid and take out the malfunctioning Waste Ingestion and Janitor Units (WIJUs). Naturally the place is filled with adversaries looking to harm poor Sweevo, including Horrible Little Girls and Goose-Stepping Dictators, although much of the time he proves to be his own worst enemy as lives can be lost by repeatedly bumping into inanimate, immovable objects. The puzzles presented by *Sweevo's World* are simple enough to decipher, but cunning enough to make the gameplay enjoyable from beginning to end. Ultimately this game has proven to be one of the high points of isometric gaming on the Spectrum.



Name : Starglider

Year : 1986

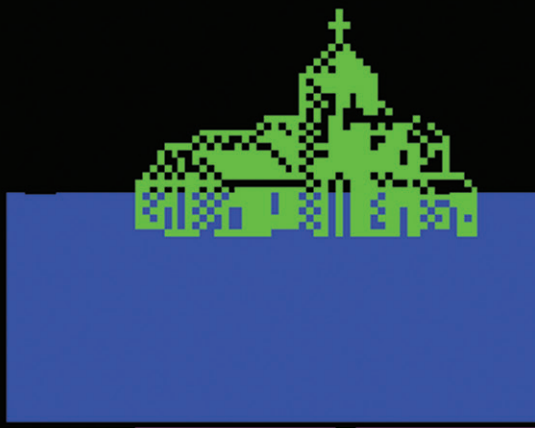
Publisher : Rainbird Software

Author : Ian Oliver, Graeme Baird, David Lowe

Starglider was one of the big Spectrum games released in the run up to Christmas 1986, a time when the computer's popularity was arguably at its peak. One of the more famous 128K games, it was also released as a vanilla 48K version which lacks the former's amazing music and digitised speech (courtesy of Rainbird's Claire Edgeley). The game comes in an impressive box and includes an excellent novella by James Follett that sets the scene evocatively for the coming battle. You play an inhabitant of the peaceful planet Novenia; protected by an automated defence system known as the Sentinels, Novenia remains safe until a bunch of nasties known as the Egrons attack, cunningly disguised as *Starglider* birds which the Sentinels are programmed not to attack. With the Novenians totally unprepared, two mechanics discover an ancient fighter and take to the skies to defend their planet. *Starglider* is essentially a shoot-'em-up at heart, but a mightily impressive one. Its vector graphics (courtesy of experts Realtime) fairly zip around the screen as our brave heroes battle to save their homeworld.

DURELL

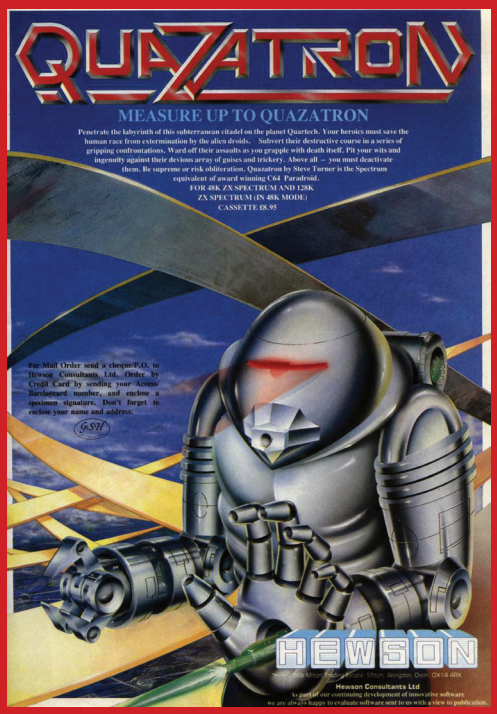
Name	:	Thanatos
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Durell
Author	:	Mike A. Richardson, Jane Richardson, Julian Breeze



Ever wanted to be a dragon? *Thanatos* is an impressive beast that flies through the air with grace in pixelated aplomb. The Sorceress Eros has been imprisoned by the evil Lord of the underworld and all her belongings have been locked up in a number of separate castles. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to find all the Sorceresses bits and pieces so she can restore the land to its former glory and reinstate the good names of the dragons – gripping stuff eh! *Thanatos* is a big beast of green pixels and can either run clumsily on the ground or fly and soar through the air with grace. Press the fire button and 'fire' explodes out of the dragon's mouth scorching anyone near (especially spear throwing men) and sending them to an early cremation. On finding Eros from one of the castles, she jumps on your back as you search out other castles re-introducing her to her lost items – sometimes it can be hard being a taxi for a damsel in distress.

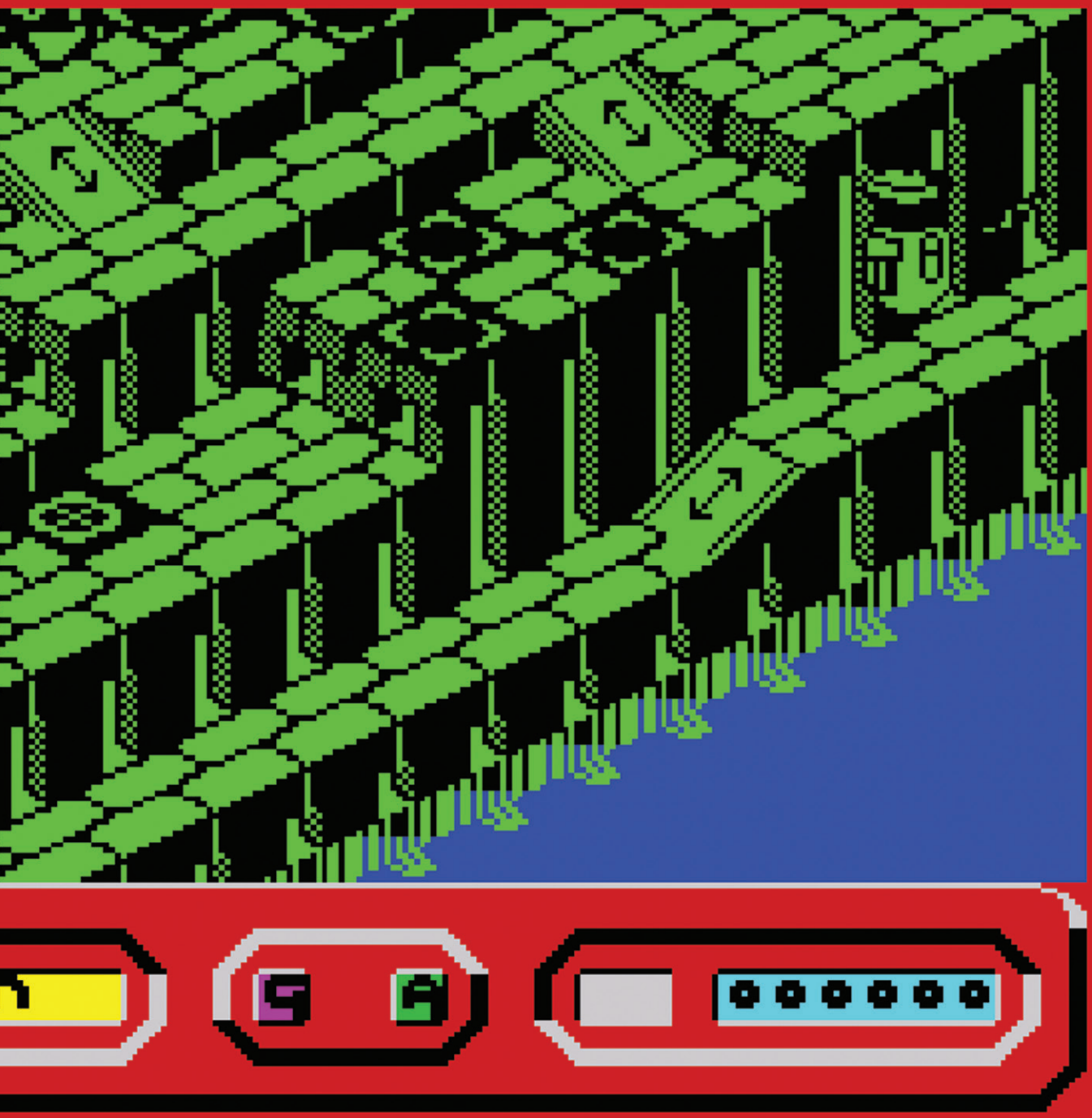
HEWSON

Name : Quazatron
Year : 1986
Publisher : Hewson
Author : Steve Turner

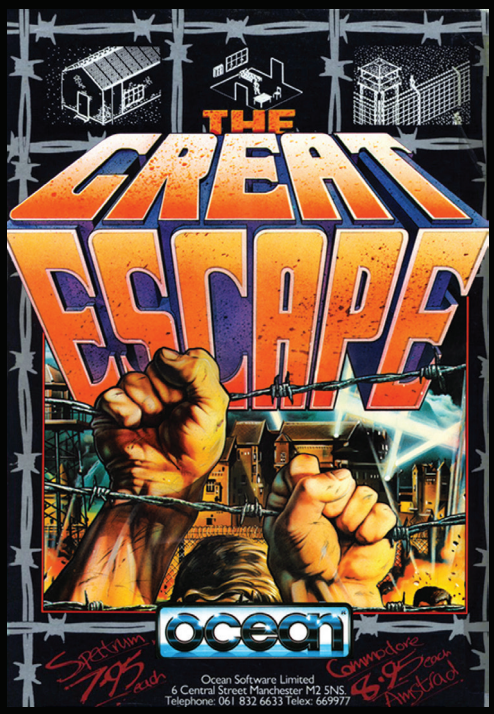


SUBJECT. THE PLANET QUARTECH
TYPE. CLASS 1 MINERAL CONTENT
CIVILIZATION. DROID CULTURE OF
UNKNOWN ORIGIN. PARADROID
COMBAT GROUP REPORTED VAST
SUBTERRANEAN STRUCTURES BEFORE
BEING WIPED OUT.
DEFENCE. MASSIVE BEAM WEAPON
PREVENTS FULL SCALE ATTACK.
PASSED TO SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FOR DROID REACTIVATION
HISTORY. ATTEMPTS TO PENETRATE
CITADEL FAILED. THE ALIEN
DROIDS HAVE SUPERIOR WEAPONS.
THE PARADROID INFLUENCE DEVICE
FAILED TO CONTROL THE ALIEN
DROIDS BUT IT WAS ABLE TO
TRANSMIT ENOUGH DATA TO BUILD
A CLOSE QUARTERS GRAPPLE UNIT.

Quazatron is the story of KLP–2 (Klepto – geddit?), an understandably sad-looking droid given a near-suicidal task of deactivating all the hostile droids on the eponymous planet. KLP–2 can do this in three different ways; either by using his in-built laser, pushing them off the side of the level or grappling with them, a process which opens up a neat mini-game. The latter method also allows KLP–2 to harvest parts from the enemy droid – provided he wins the mini-game of course. Purportedly a version of the Commodore 64 hit game *Paradroid*, *Quazatron* is enough of a game in its own right to disown this tag. Set in an isometric world, KLP–2 moves nicely around the metallic environments, grappling with droids whenever it suits. The grapple game itself is deceptively simple, presenting a central security circuit with which KLP–2 must turn a superior amount of parts into his colour, under a strict time limit. There's a good risk-reward mechanic too, as the superior droids logically carry the better parts for KLP–2 to harvest – but are also the hardest to beat in the grapple.

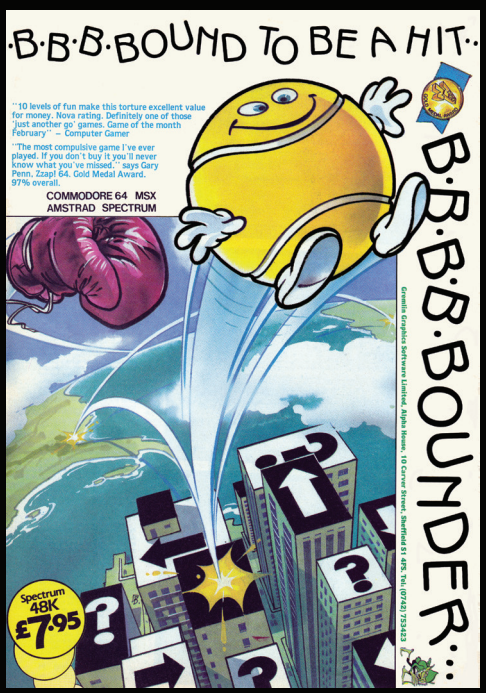


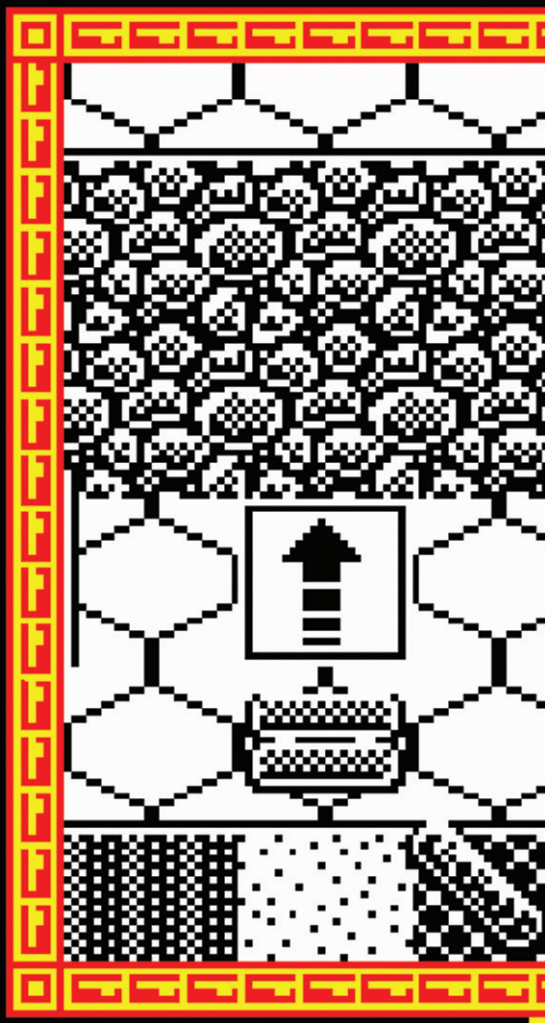
Name	:	The Great Escape
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	John Heap (Denton Designs)

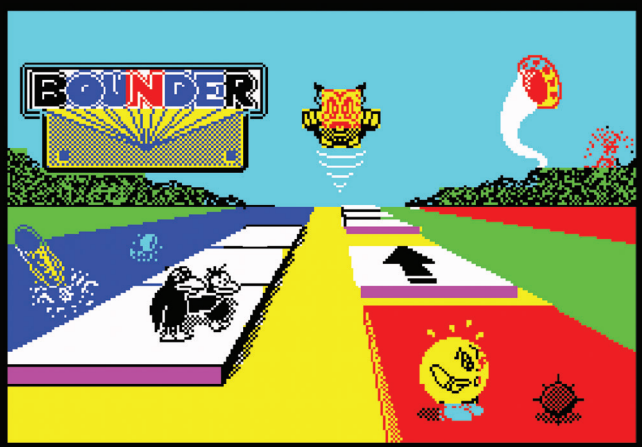


Monochrome graphics were frequently used on the Spectrum to avoid attribute clash. In this adaptation of the famous prison break, the stark black and white display suits the downbeat nature perfectly. Playing an unnamed prisoner of war, it is your noble duty to attempt to escape. This can be done several ways from disguising yourself as a guard to finding a way to slip through the wire fences. *The Great Escape's* camp is open world in design, but stray too far from the regular path of the prisoners and you are likely to get discovered and end up in solitary confinement, wasting precious time and morale. Morale is the 'energy bar' for *The Great Escape* – should it sink too low then your character gives up and the game is over. Another fascinating aspect of *The Great Escape* is how your character, if left alone, carries on their duties such as attending roll call and meal times. Just watching the prisoners wander around in this little world can entertain, although of course slipping away to try and find those elusive wire cutters is even more fun.

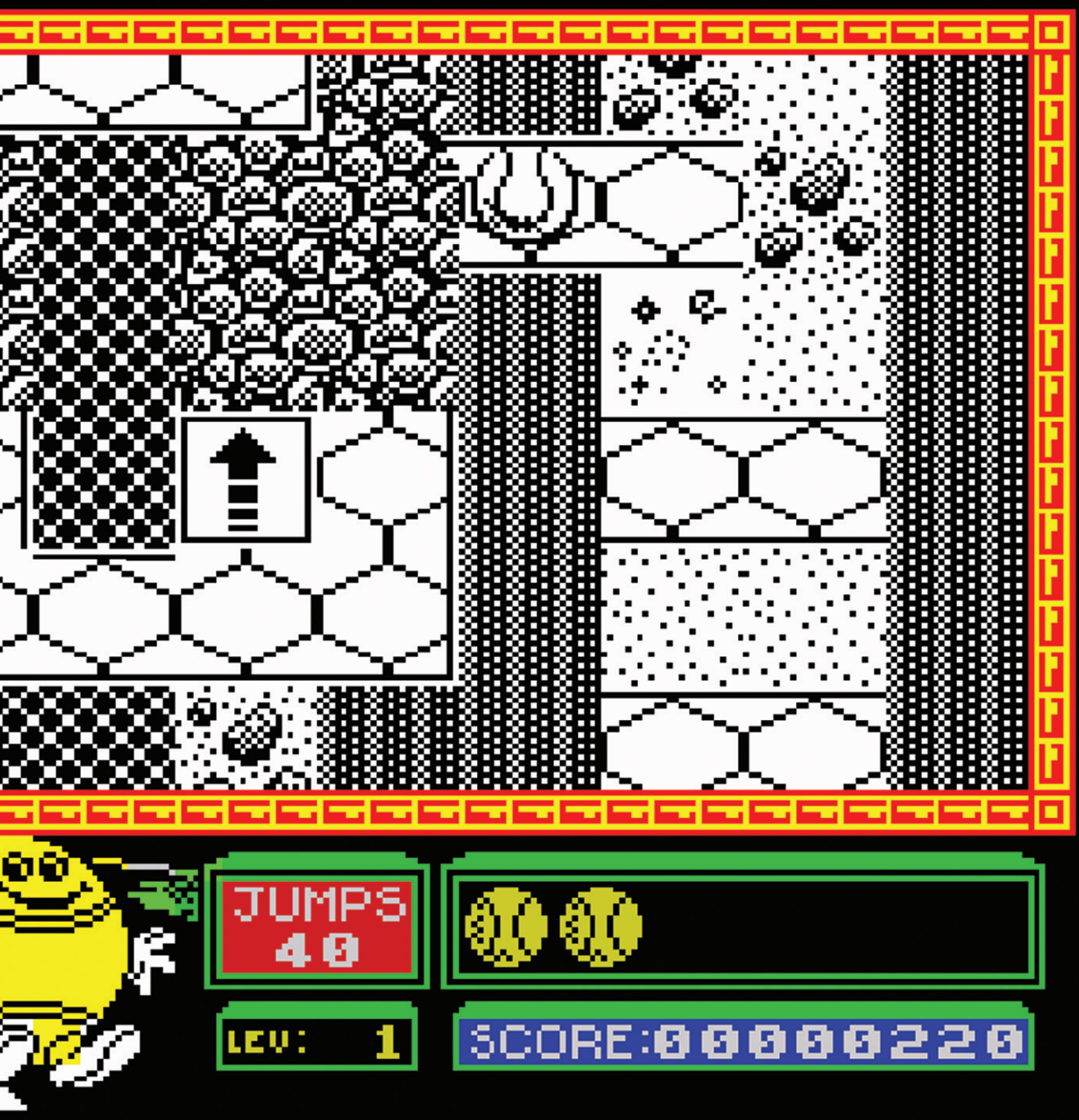
Name	:	Bounder
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Gremlin Graphics
Author	:	Shaun Hollingworth, Chris Kerry, Peter M. Harrap, Marco Duroe

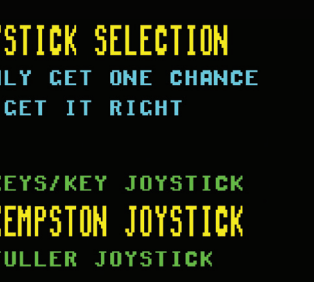




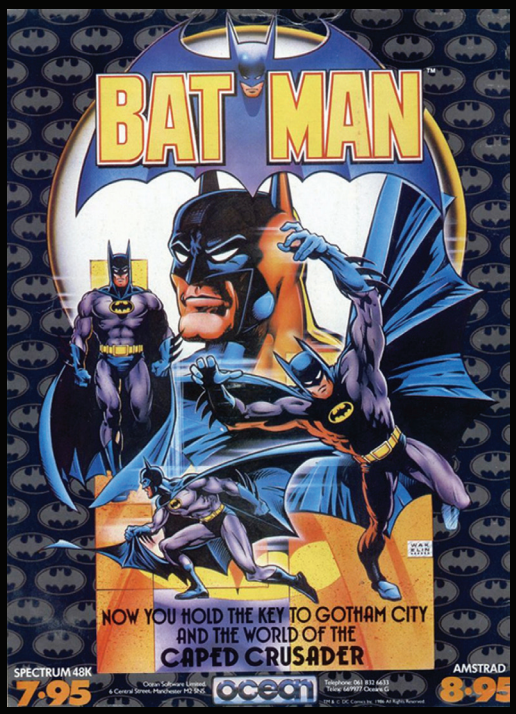


It's only since the smartphone revolution that we're seeing the type of gameplay that debuted in the smash hit *Bounder* returning to our screens. The infinite runner, as the sub-genre is now known, is immensely popular, but its origins can be traced right back to this quirky, engaging Spectrum platformer. Although you were in control of a tennis ball, you weren't playing tennis (which is nice, since tennis is very, very boring). The bouncing ball never really stopped, despite its world being filled with all manner of obstacles and ways to die. Viewed from above, the levels were built up of tiles, many of which you couldn't touch, and many of which required crackerjack timing to jump between; particularly since you had to take the ball's current elevation into account when moving. Some tiles would put a bit of extra height in your bounce and helped you make it to the end of the screen before jumping into the bonus rounds. It was a highly original game that caught a lot of people by surprise, so it's no wonder that its influence can still be felt today.

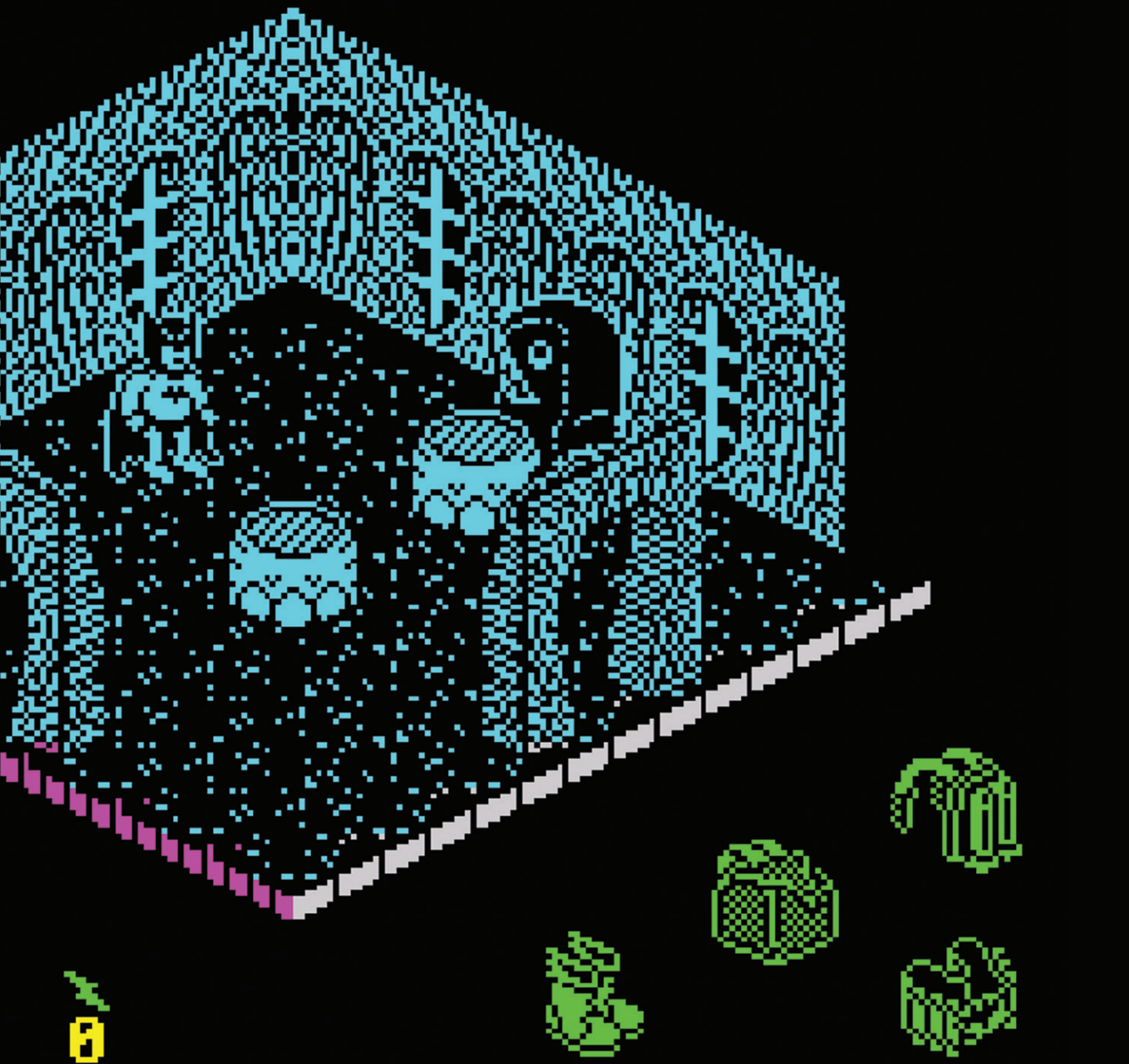




Name	:	Batman
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond, Mark Serlin, F. David Thorpe



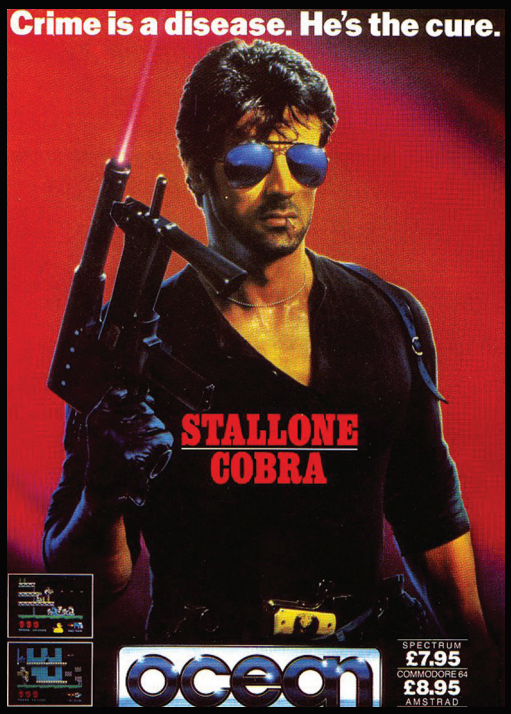
Until this version of the Caped Crusader, released in 1986, the superhero had been notably absent on the ZX Spectrum. Ocean handed coding duties to freelancer Jon Ritman with Ritman's colleague, Bernie Drummond, handling the graphics. The story is as follows: Robin has been captured by the Joker and in order to rescue him, Batman needs to assemble his trusty batcraft. Unfortunately the parts to the machine are scattered all around the batcave and the Joker has left his minions to distract the bat along with some bemusing puzzles. To help Batman in his task there are useful items such as the batboots (jump higher), batbag (hold more objects) and batbelt (slow his fall), in addition to special powers such as shields and an energy boost. The game is presented in isometric graphics with a rather squat and comical-looking Batman, which is at odds with the lean superhero of the front cover. It's not an easy game, and was bettered in many respects by Ocean's *Caped Crusader* a few years later, but is still regarded by many as one of the better isometric games.

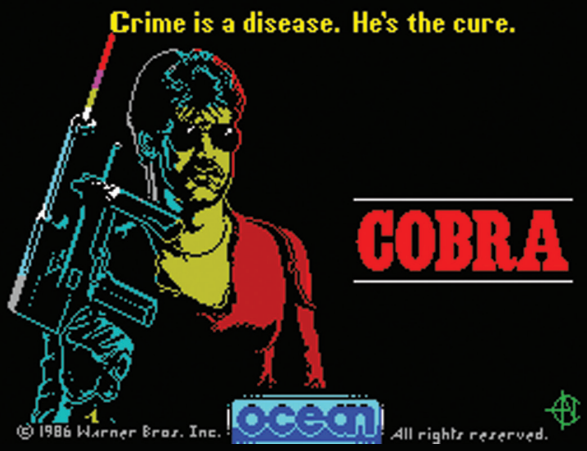


Name	:	Thrust
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Firebird
Author	:	David Lowe, Simon Clarke

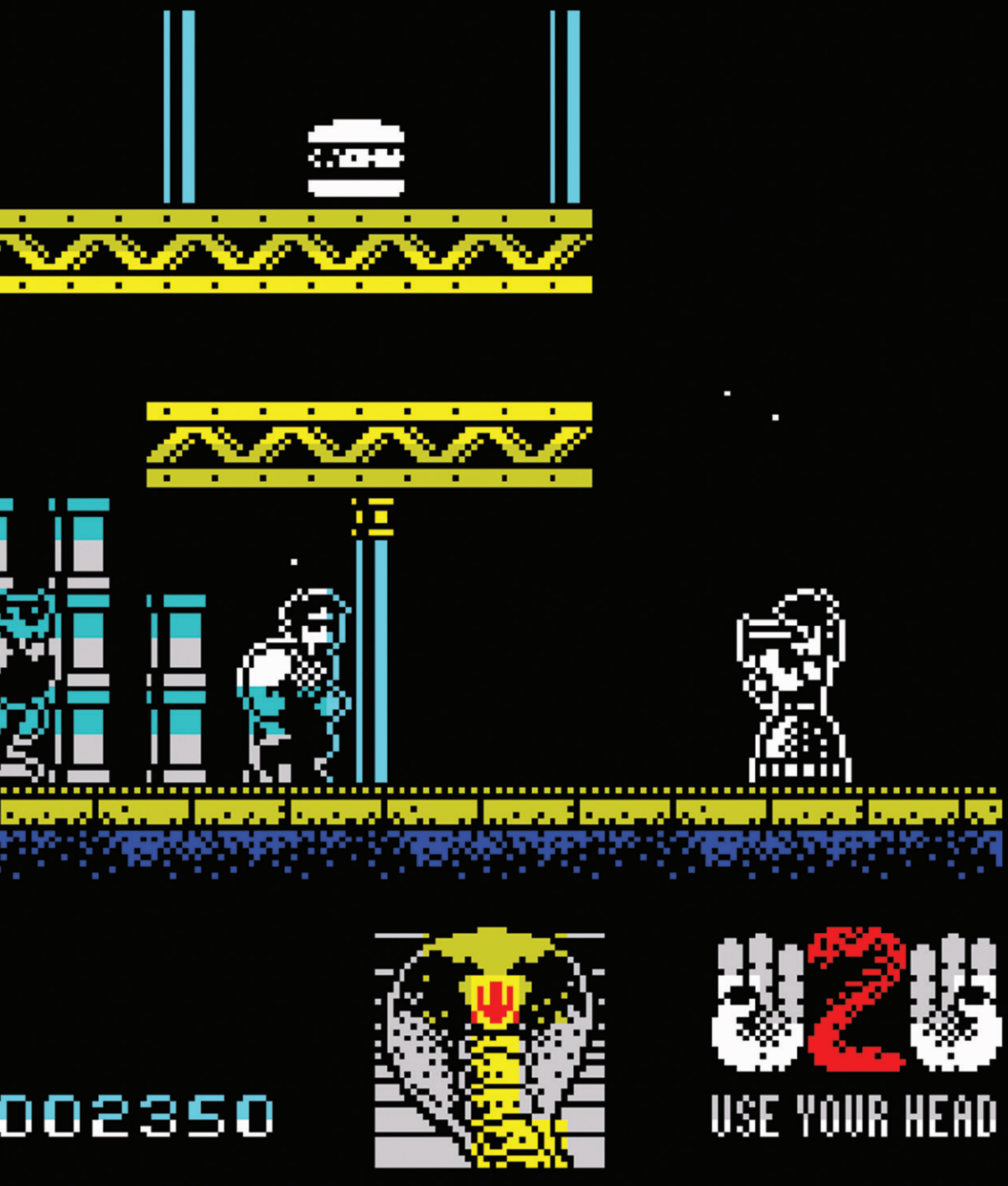
Thrust is a conversion of a popular Commodore 64/ BBC game which in itself is a clone of old arcade games such as *Lunar Lander* and, in particular, *Gravitar.* Its plot is routine and familiar stuff: you are part of a resistance, planning a major offensive against an evil galactic empire. Having stolen several spaceships, the resistance now needs fuel for them, which must also be half-inched from the stereotypical bad guys. Each planet contains a fuel pod which your small craft can lift and tow behind it. Some nestle awkwardly underground, and all of them are protected by the empire's limpet guns. These guns can be temporarily disabled by blasting their reactor, but be careful: too many shots and it overheats and explodes giving the player just ten seconds to escape. If you haven't got the last fuel pod in tow, the mission is a failure. Your ship rotates smoothly and must be constantly controlled against the harsh gravity making *Thrust* a tough game, but excellent value for just £1.99.

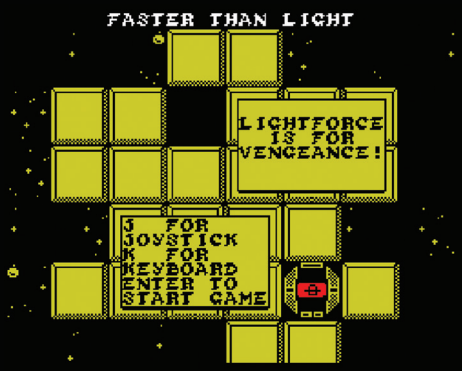
Name	:	Cobra
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Jonathan M. Smith, Steve Cain, Martin Galway



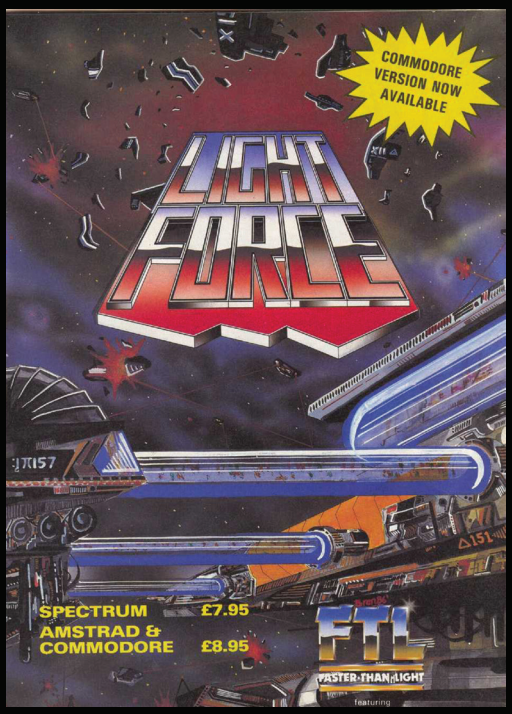


Even the most ardent of Sylvester Stallone fans would surely admit that the movie *Cobra* was hardly the Italian Stallion's finest effort. Starring as Marion "Cobra" Cobretti, Stallone grunts and groans his way through a ridiculous and vague plot before coming face to face with the evil night slasher at the film's conclusion. On seeing the script, Ocean Software perhaps saw that despite being weak cinematically, it could actually make a decent computer game. Coding duties were handled by Jonathan Smith who infused *Cobra* not only with his anarchic sense of humour but also supreme technical skills. Playing over three different scrolling levels, Cobra faces an array of enemies with initially just a lethal head-butt to dispatch them with. Rocket launcher-toting women and prams(!) gang up on our hero; hamburgers dotted around the play area once picked up give Cobra either a weapon (knife, pistol, machine gun) or make him temporarily invincible. Acquire and use all four burgers, pick up the damsel in distress, kill all the baddies and it's off to the next level.





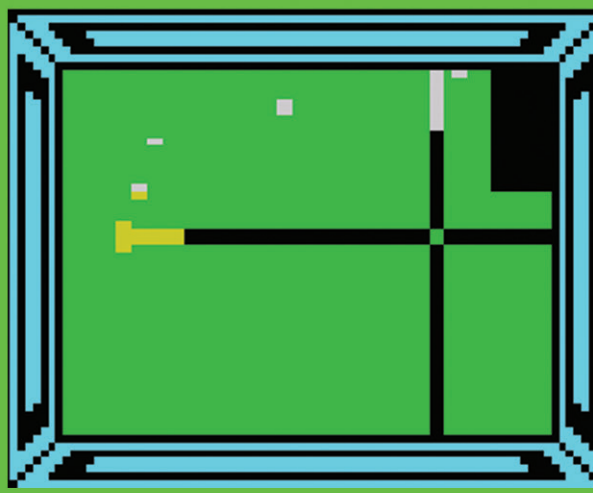
Name	:	Light Force
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Faster Than Light
Author	:	Greg Follis, Roy Carter



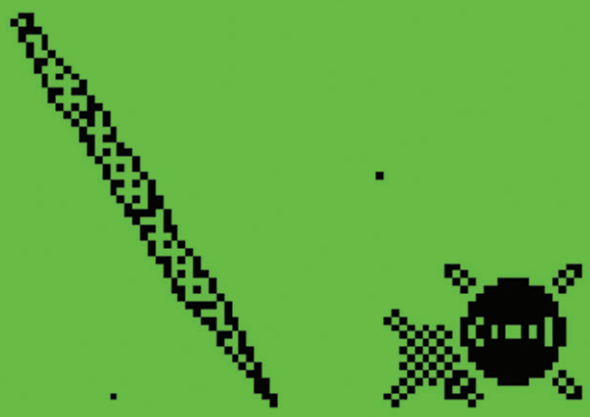
It's easy to dismiss *Light Force* today as a vacuous attempt at a vertically scrolling shooter, but the effect it had back in 1986 was seismic. It was published by Faster Than Light, a new label from action adventure specialists Gargoyle who wanted to publish arcade games in addition to its normal output. The label didn't last long on the Spectrum although *Shockway Rider*, and in particular, *Hydrofool*, are excellent games. When FTL released preview shots of *Light Force*, showing off its new 'Lasermation' technique, the previews in Spectrum magazines were inevitably effusive. In 1986, most developers had two solutions to the computer's ugly attribute clash issue: either make the game monochrome or not worry about it and let it run riot. Programmers Roy Carter and Greg Follis worked around the colour-clash by using large, blocky sprites and keeping them within an eight-by-eight character cell. This results in some jerky movement, but with most reviewers' jaws firmly on the floor, this downside largely went unnoticed.

DURELL

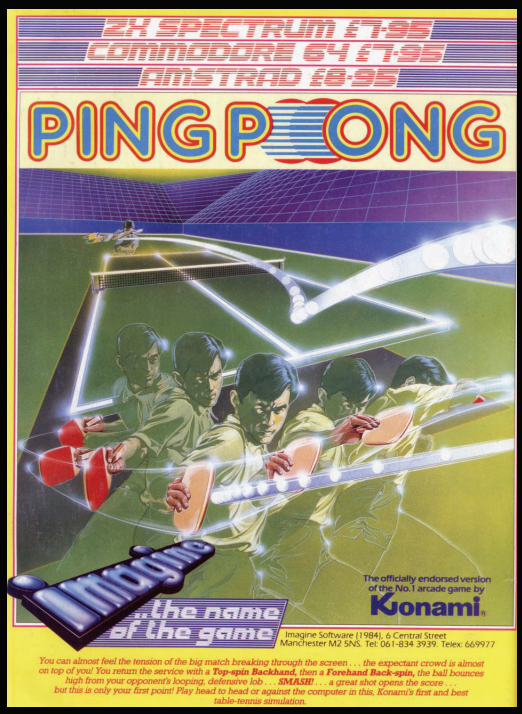
Name	:	Fat Worm Blows a Sparky
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Durell Software
Author	:	Julian G. Todd

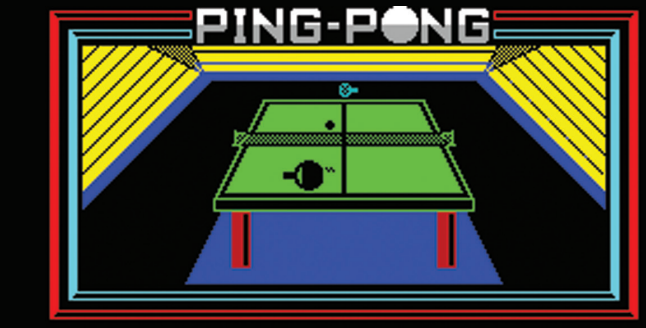


Apart from having the best title ever, *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* is also a fantastic game. Starting life as a somewhat more serious simulation of real software worms and viruses invading computer systems, it appears the developers got bored of their po-faced concept and decided to go in the completely opposite direction, creating a nonsensical and utterly bizarre game in the process. The titular porcine worm has decided that the inside of the computer is the warmest and safest place to be. Faced with the task of reproducing himself using the spindles that lay around the motherboard, Fat Worm must also avoid sputniks and crawlies that attach themselves to his body; fortunately a de-bugger rids his corpulent form of these electrical pests. *Fat Worm* was uniformly praised upon release, with particular acclaim reserved for its original gameplay and stunning 3D graphics and despite its size, the main character moves adroitly around the inside of the computer. As Crash magazine succinctly concluded: "Extremely silly and wonderful fun."



Name	:	Ping Pong
Year	:	1986
Publisher	:	Imagine Software
Author	:	Doug Burns, Jonathan M. Smith, Martin Galway





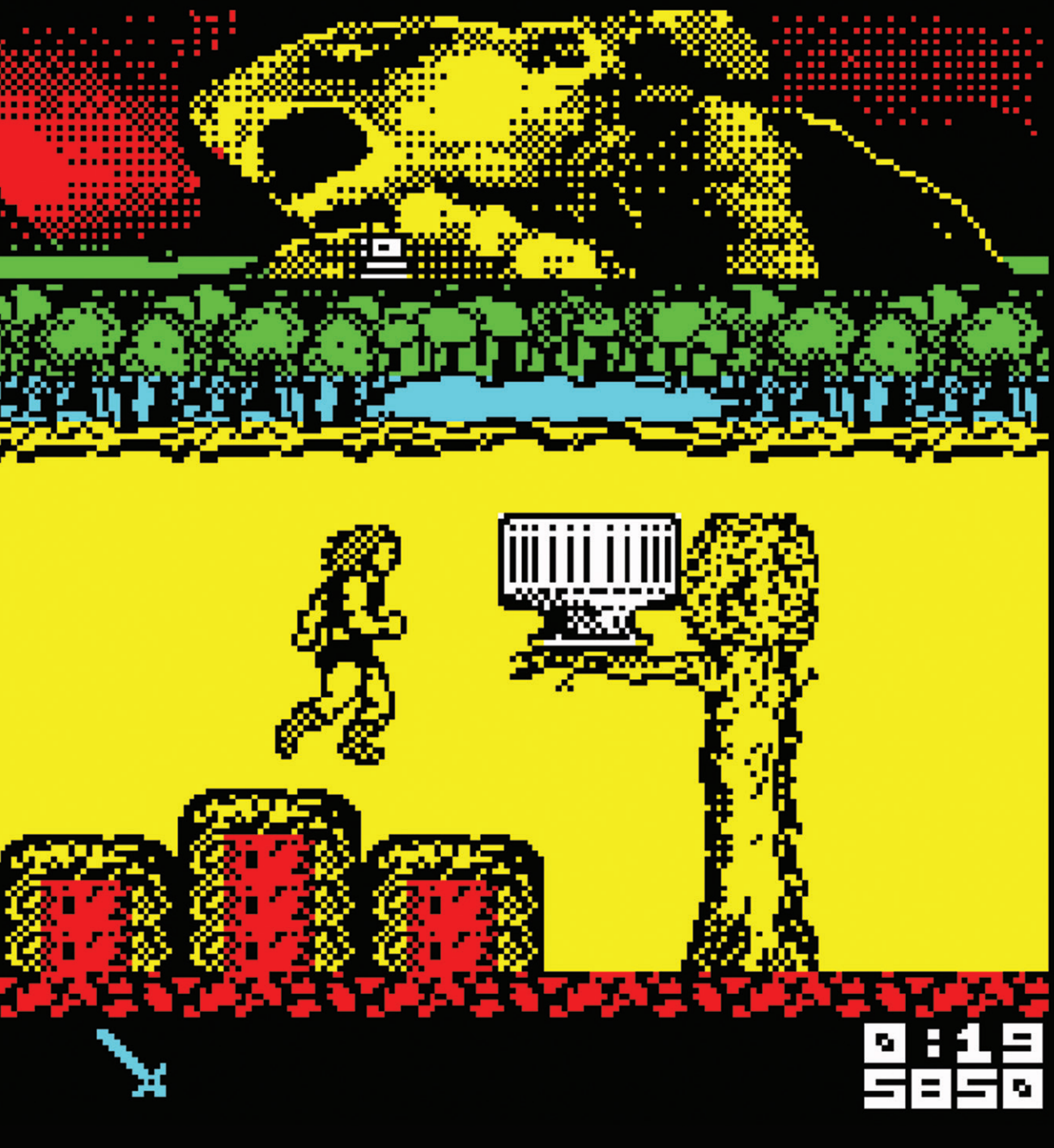
Based on a Konami arcade game which never really saw much action in the UK, *Ping Pong* on the Spectrum is an excellent and playable game from Imagine, the label by then owned by Ocean. It presents the action in pseudo-3D view with floating bats at each end, and the rules are simple: first player to 11 points wins the round with a change of serve after each round. The bats automatically track the ball, meaning the player can concentrate on which shot to play, the timing of it and whether to use backhand or forehand. Two shots can be played, a drive and a smash, with a lob resulting should you or your opponent mis-time either. Points are scored in addition to the scoring system for a hi-score table. Despite an inevitable lack of variation, *Ping Pong* is immense fun, initially easy to master but a devil to beat on the CPU's higher levels. Against a human opponent it's even more fun, despite some ear-churning cheering from the crowd.

O FOR JOYSTICK
K FOR KEYBOARD
FIRE TO START.

THUNDERCATS (C) 1987

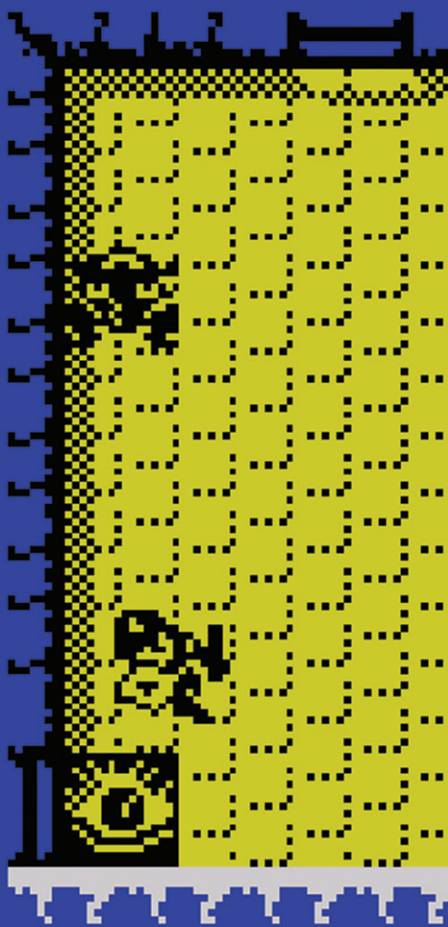
Name	:	Thundercats
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Elite Systems
Author	:	Roy Carter, Stuart Cox, Rob Hubbard, Ian Upton

Thundercats in the 80s was a big deal. Although we didn't know at the time that the team behind the animation would pave the way for the renowned Studio Ghibli (we didn't have the sight-beyond-sight to see that one coming), we could plainly see how the artistic quality of this amazing cartoon made its closest rivals look like finger painted flick books. So expectations were high for the look and feel of its first digital adaptation. Lion-O and friends had to look as incredible as they did on afternoon TV, or all would be lost. Fortunately, Elite came through once again. It all began with the loading and menu screens, which are simply stunning. The size and animation of Lion-O's character is mesmerising as you set off on a battle-strewn journey through the savannah, into the caves and over the mountains in search of the evil Mumm-Ra. A tough game, to be sure, but it provides hours of nonstop action and arcade quality gameplay that makes it an essential part of the Thundercats lineage.

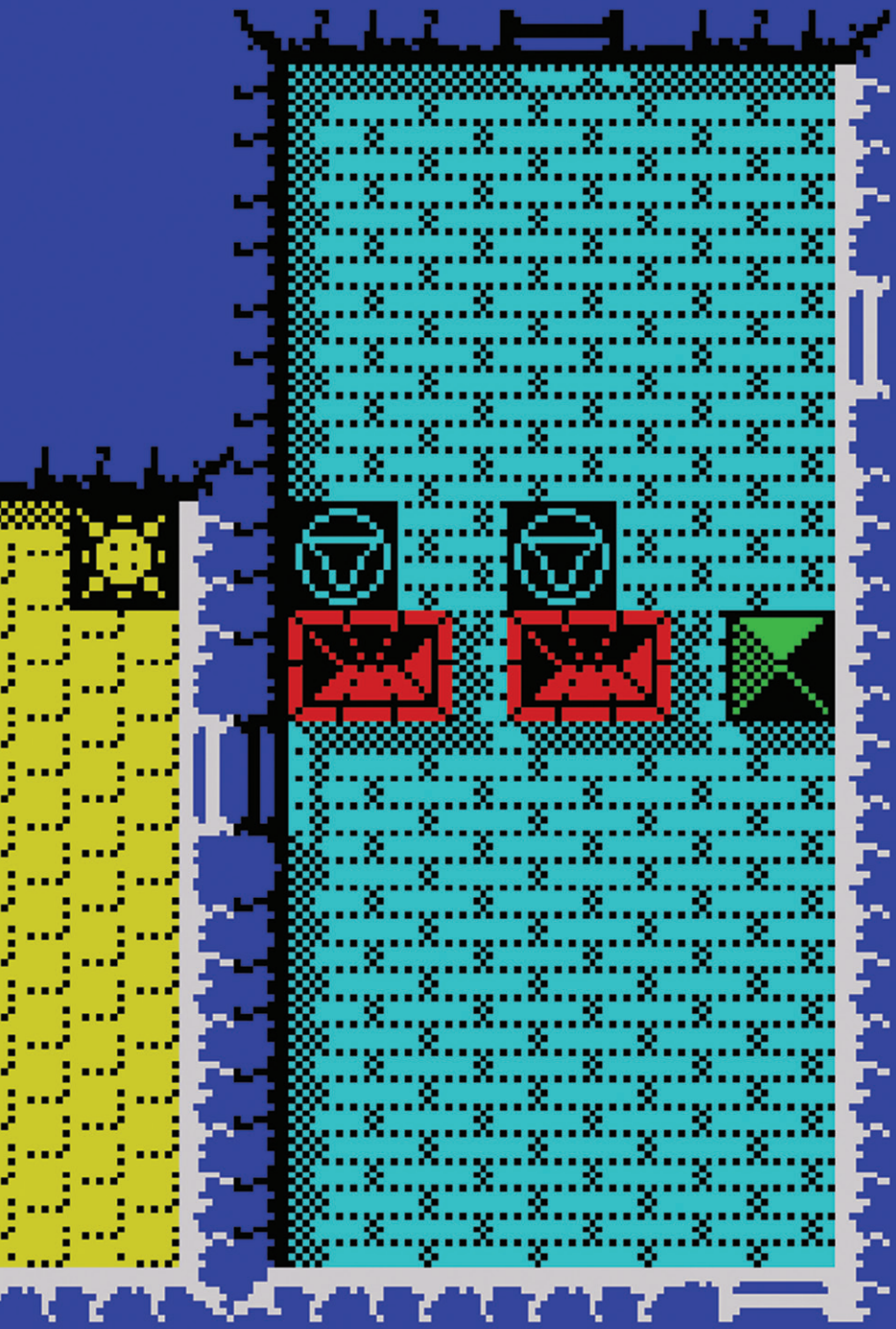


HEWSON

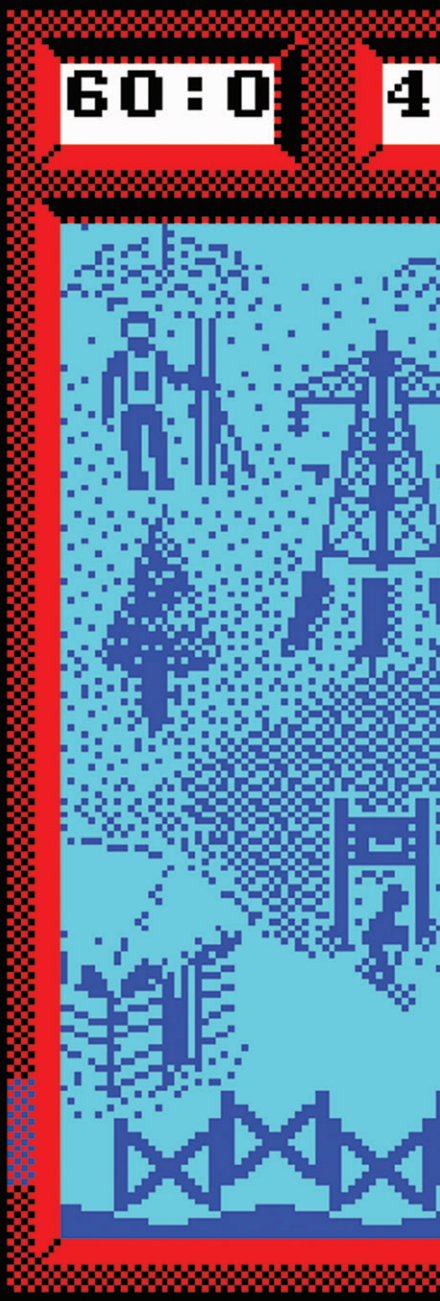
Name	:	Ranarama
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Hewson
Author	:	Steve Turner



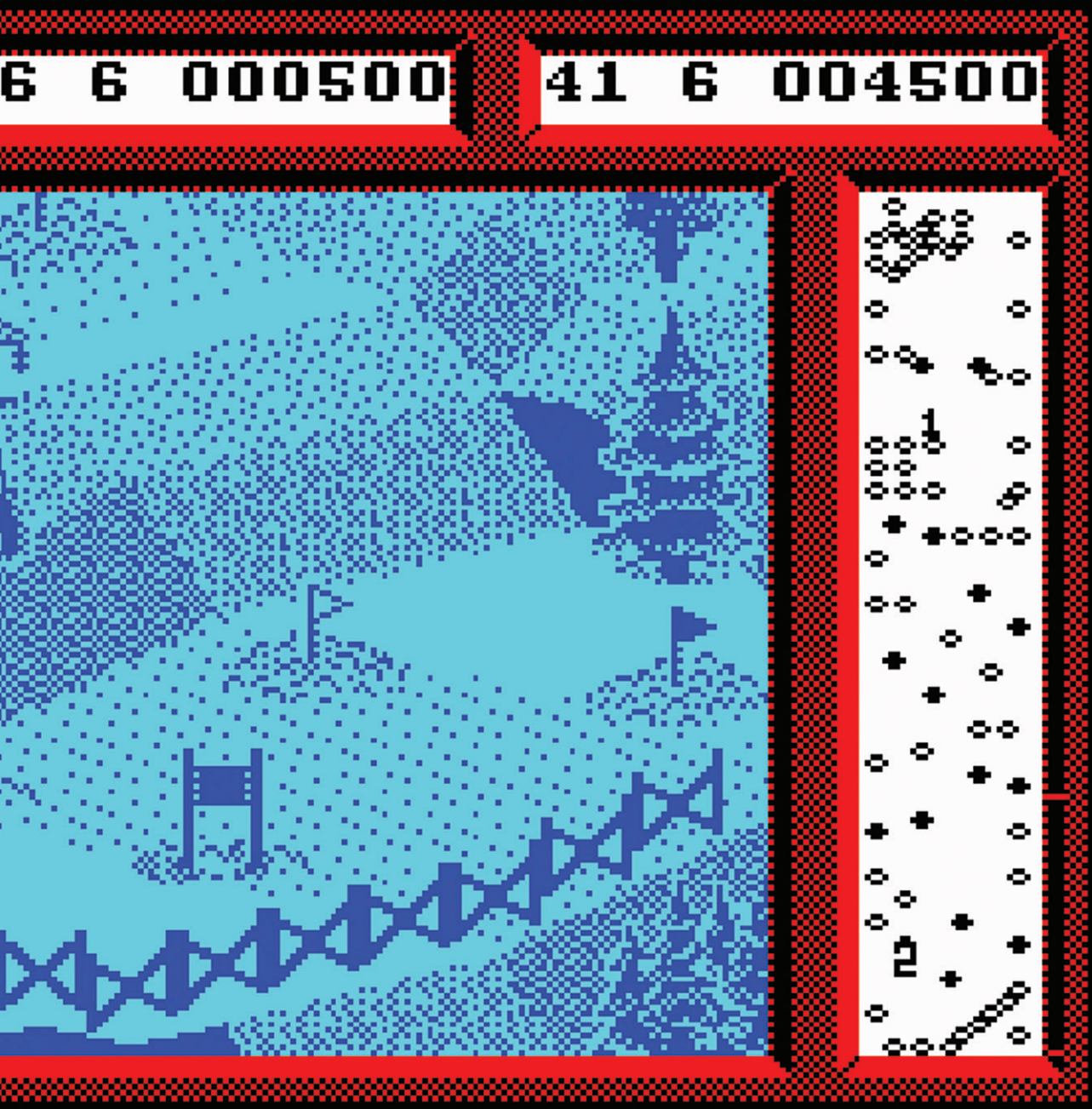
The inspiration for this frog-based dungeon crawler seems to be many and varied. It's claimed that *Quazatron* is its most direct influence, which itself was inspired by *Paradroid,* which unjustly bypassed the Speccy altogether. And yet, if you really had to choose a game that best resembled *Ranarama's* heritage, it'd have to be the superb *Gauntlet*. *Gauntlet,* of course, had a great Spectrum conversion all of its own, but *Ranarama* has a lot to offer of its own accord. For one thing, the main character, Mervyn, makes use of four different types of magic as he roams the levels hunting his evil enemies. This includes defensive options, as well as offensive, wide-ranging attacks and power ups. The game is set in a labyrinthine tomb packed with monsters and spawn points that churn out adversaries as quickly as you can dispatch them. You never know just what is around the corner or through the doorway, making *Ranarama* a much faster, and often more furious entry in the early dungeon crawler genre.

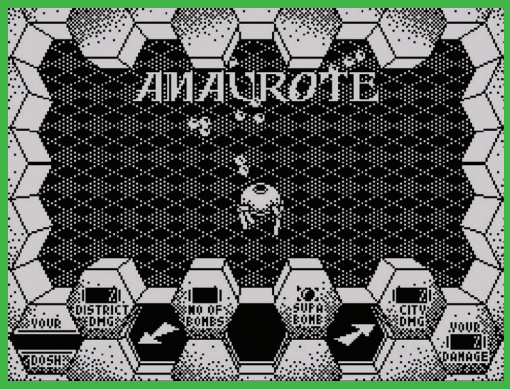


Name	:	Professional Ski Simulator
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Codemasters
Author	:	The Oliver Twins, James Wilson, Jon Paul Eldridge

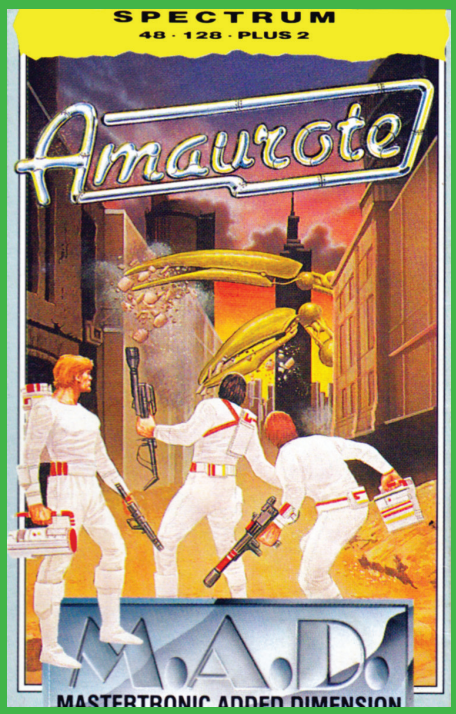


One cannot help but hum the tune to Ski Sunday when playing *Professional Ski Simulator* – it's that kind of game. Philip and Andrew Oliver took a break from their famous *Dizzy* brand to bring the European ski slopes into the bedroom. The controls are simple with the left and right movements on the joystick rotating the player and the fire button propelling the skier forwards with his sticks. It has to be said that so far this game sounds like a little like the skiing section in *Horace Goes Skiing*, and if we are blatantly honest with ourselves it is. The Olivers though have gone the extra mile and created a graphically rich ski slope with obstacles to avoid and flags to ski around – you can even race your mate down the hill to the finishing line in two-player mode. Whilst not as successful as their *Dizzy* games in terms of sales, *Professional Ski Simulator* is a memorable budget game with great re-playability and should be dusted off each year whilst watching the skiing on the TV.

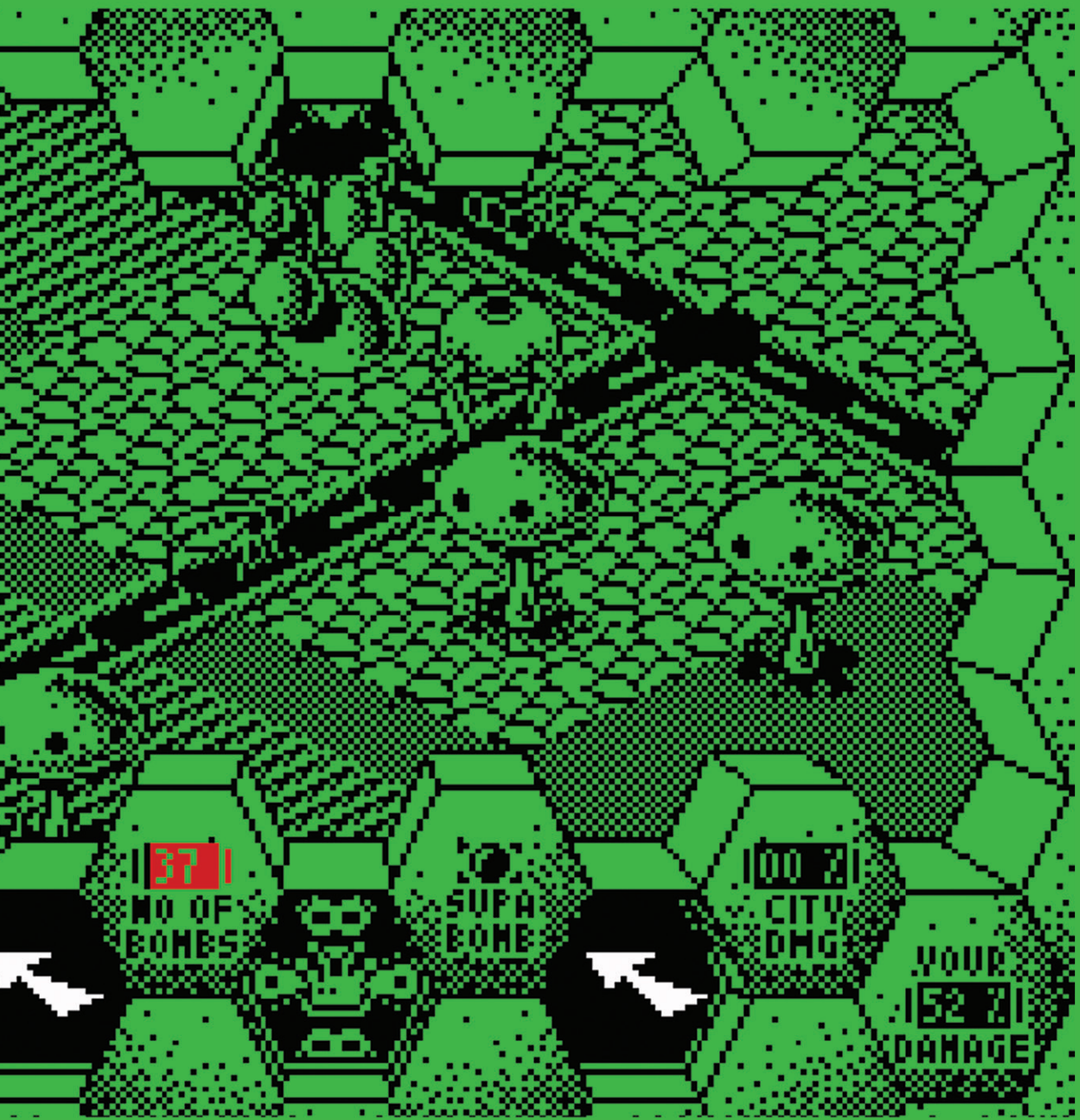




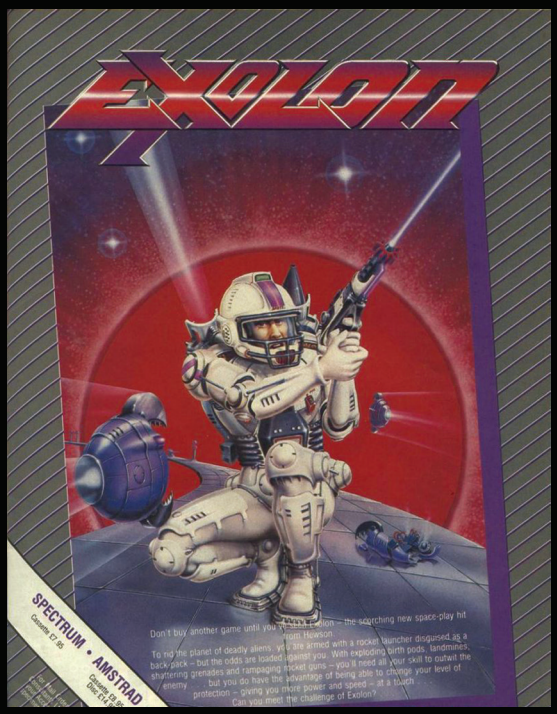
Name : Amaurote
Year : 1987
Publisher : Mastertronic Added Dimension
Author : John Pickford, Ste Pickford, David Whittaker

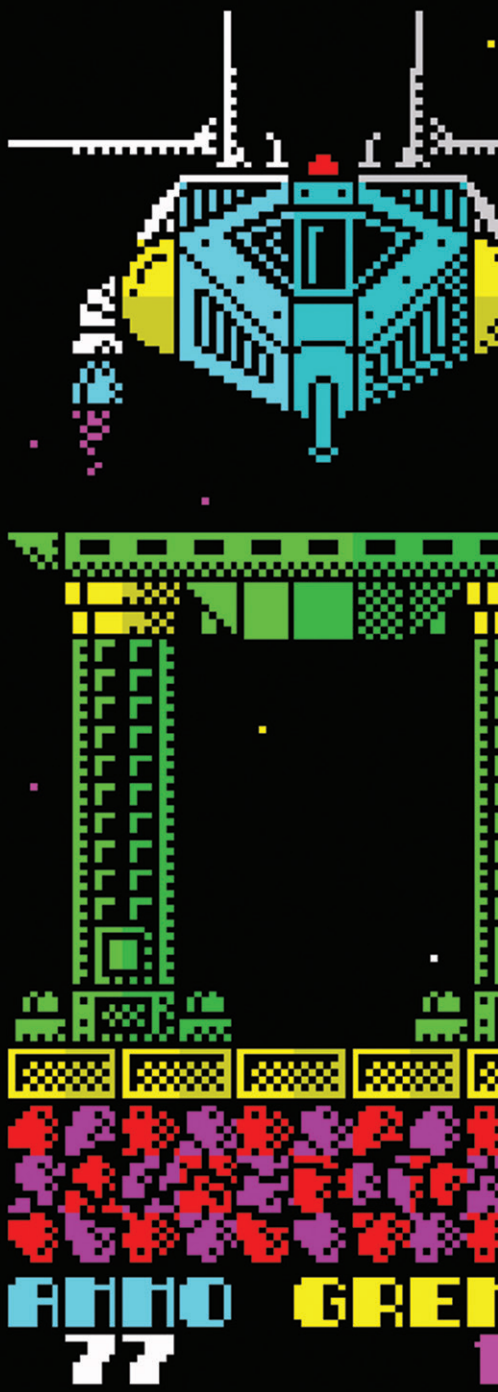


The Pickford Bros are known for producing slightly peculiar games – look at *Feud* and *Glider Rider* to name but two. *Amaurote* takes the peculiarity to a new level and first impressions are good once the game has loaded – a detailed 3D monochromatic alien land with a walker traversing it and a thumping 128K David Whittaker soundtrack in the background. *Amaurote* is a 25-sector metropolis that has been invaded by killer insects and the mammoth task ahead is to kill all the insects and the Queen in each sector before moving onto the next – eventually (impossibly!) clearing all 25 to succeed. To kill the Queen a 'Supabomb' is purchased which is then dropped somewhere in the sector – once collected the Queen is tracked down and blown up. Mention has to go to the 128K version as that has amazing 128K music and sound as well as a brilliant attract sequence that sees you jumping into your walker and being dropped by helicopter into the sector. Whilst playing, *Amaurote* provokes mental imagery of the movie, 'Empire of the Ants' starring Joan Collins – the game is that good!

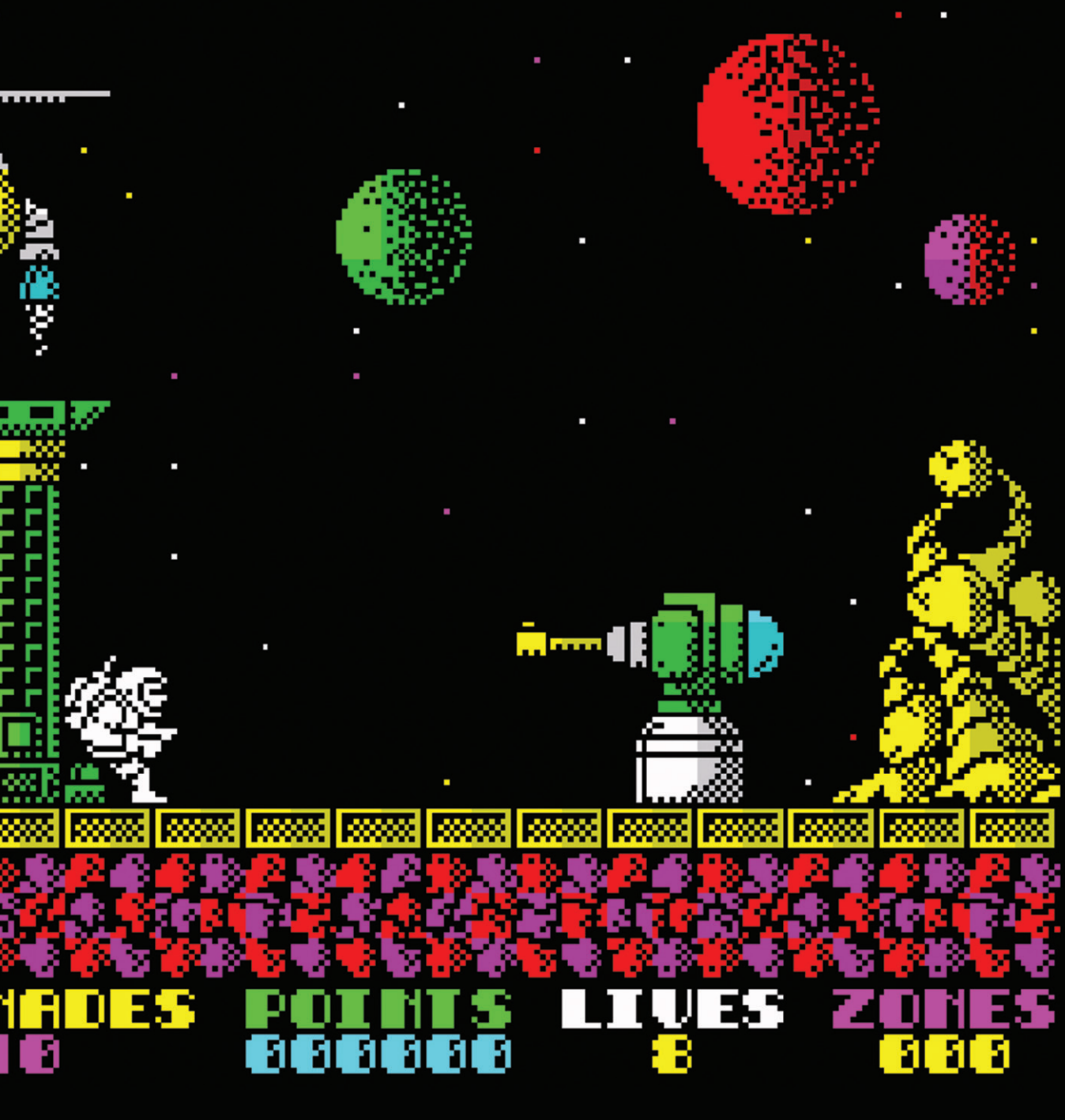


Name	:	Exolon
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Hewson Consultants
Author	:	Raffaele Cecco, Nick Jones, Nigel Brownjohn



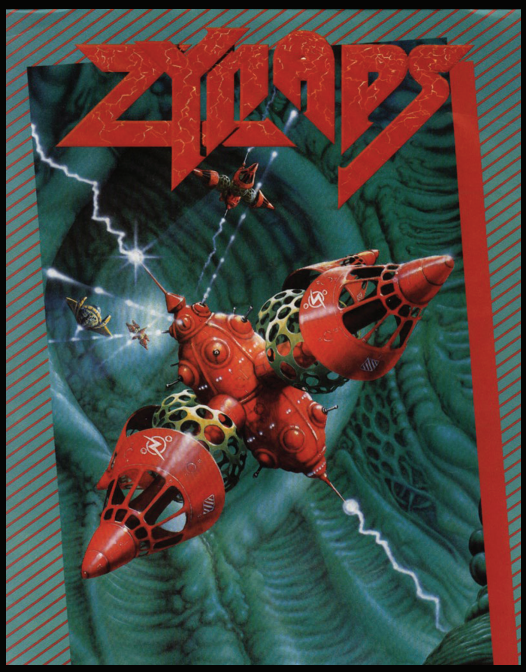


If we're all honest, colour clash isn't nice. It makes games look horrible if allowed to run riot, and often makes us look enviously at the colourful screenshots for rival computers that have no such issue. But if there's one thing the ZX Spectrum does, it makes coders think and work their way around the various quirks of the computer. And few did this better than Raffaele Cecco. Cecco had already created two games for Mikro-Gen before being prised away by Hewson in 1986. His first game for the renowned publisher was this simple, yet beautiful, run and gunner that drew admirable (if slightly fanciful) comparisons with similar arcade games of the day. *Exolon* is not a complex game; the player takes on the role of a soldier named Vitorc with no specified mission other than to proceed from left to right, screen by screen, blasting aliens and dodging deadly pneumatic hammers and gun emplacements. To help Vitorc in his quest are numerous crates of extra ammo and grenades in addition to the occasional booth which allows him to upgrade into his more-powerful exosuit and transform into the title character.



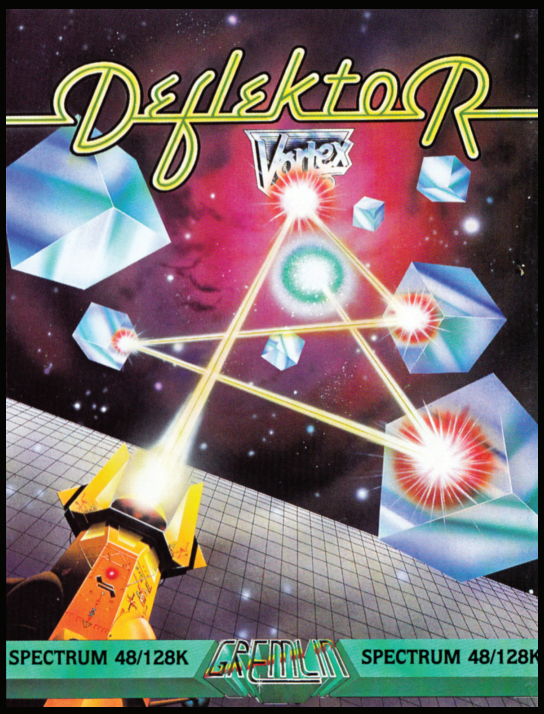
HEWSON

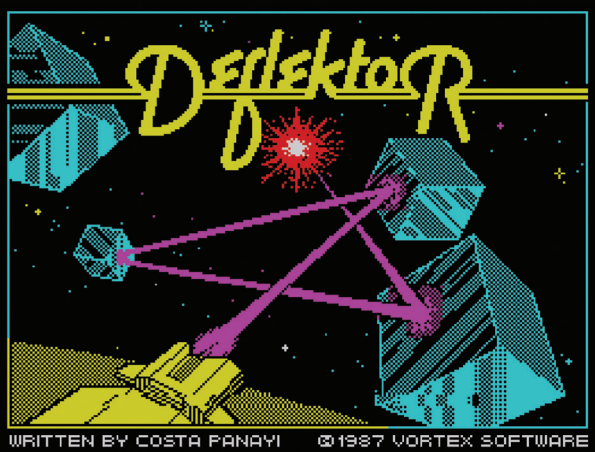
Name	:	Zynaps
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Hewson Consultants
Author	:	John Cumming, Dominic Robinson, Stephen J. Crow, Steve Turner, John M. Phillips

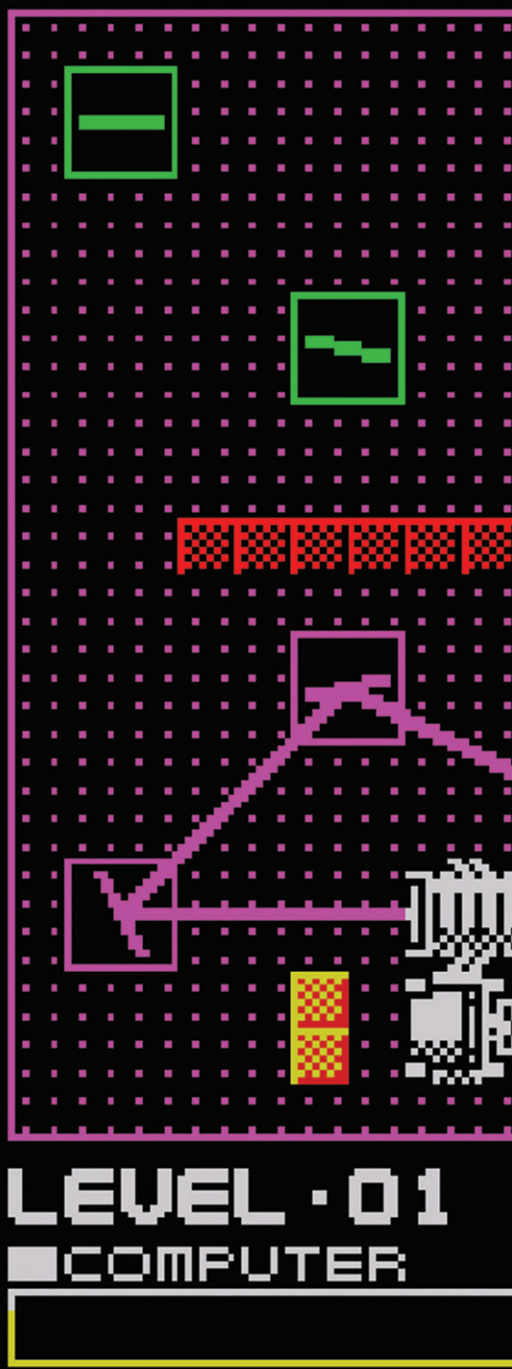


Few software houses in the Eighties enjoyed the success and reputation of Hewson. For a time, every game they released on the Spectrum struck gold, from *Exolon* to this mighty and beautiful scrolling shoot-'em-up, implausibly named *Zynaps*. Coded by Dominic Robinson and Steve Crow, *Zynaps* was at heart a *Nemesis* clone and a signal that Konami really should have done a lot better with its official adaptation of the famous arcade game. Eschewing any pretension of plot (something most were grateful for), *Zynaps* gives the player control of an odd-looking spacecraft that has to negotiate through 16 levels of enemies, both flying and ground-based. Some enemies drop glowing pods; pick these up and the player's fighter can be upgraded in a number of ways such as making it nimbler, fire more shots and drop a bomb for those pesky ground targets. *Zynaps* is a colourful, playable and addictive shoot-'em-up that upheld its publisher's impressive record, securing glowing reviews in every Spectrum magazine.

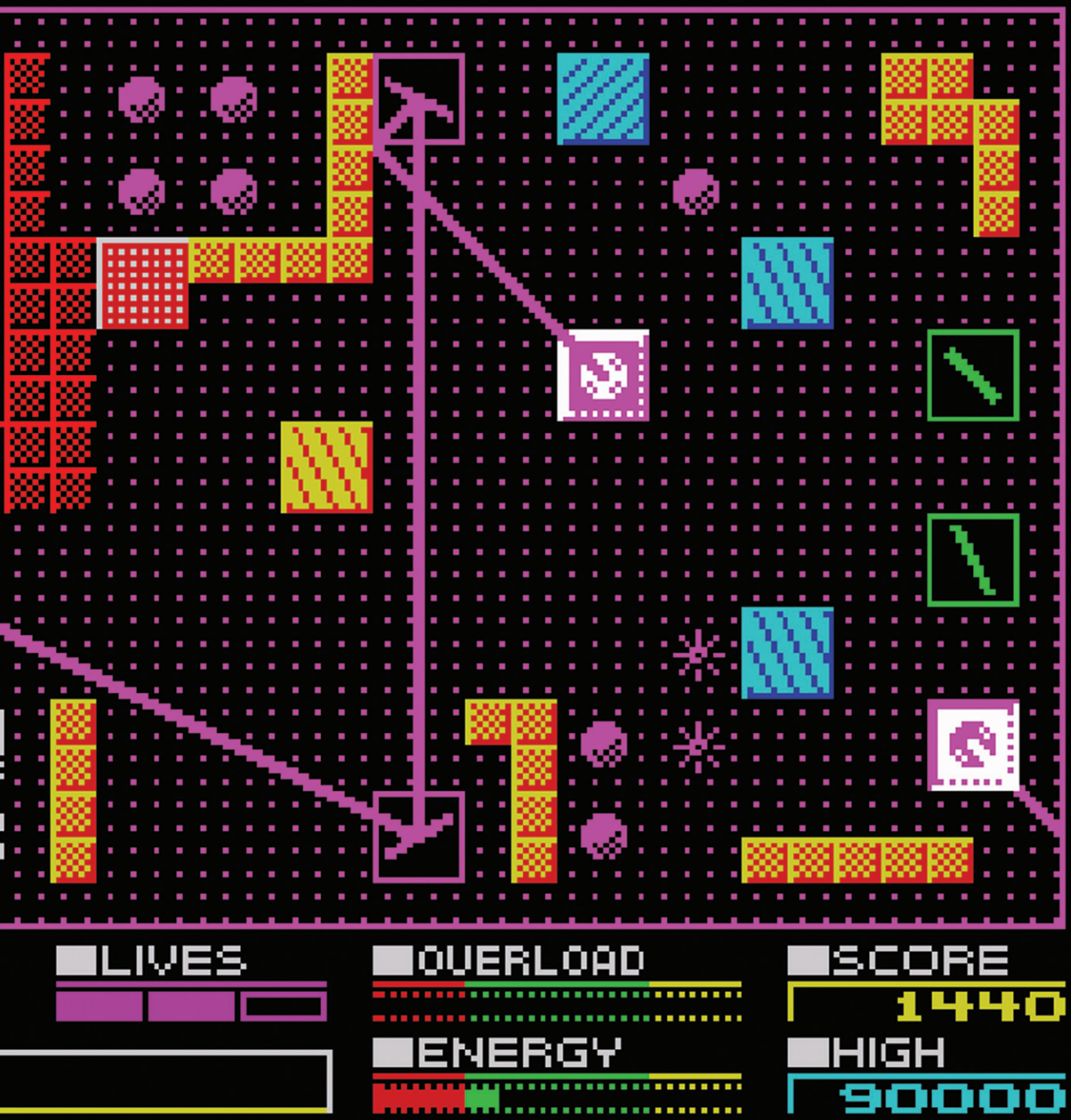
Name : Deflektor
Year : 1987
Publisher : Vortex Software
Author : Costa Panayi, Ben Daglish





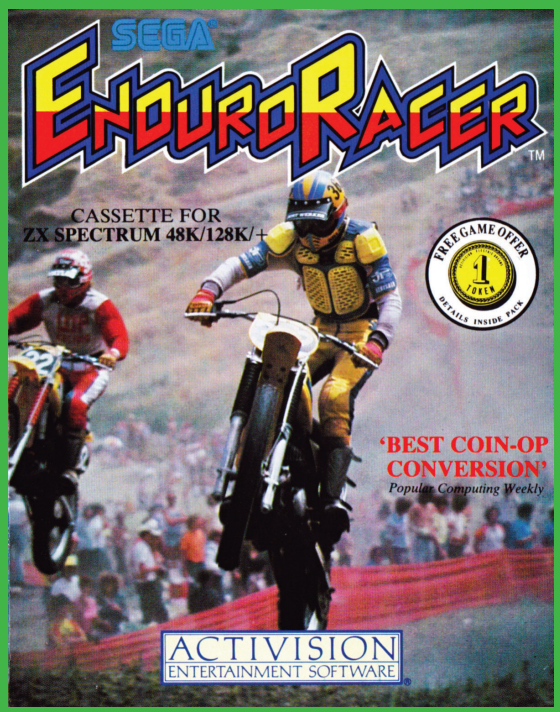


It's all smoke and mirrors I tell you! Costa Panayi must have fancied a change from programming low level Tornados and simulating helicopter downing cyclones so turned to producing a rather stunning puzzle game on his beloved Spectrum. The general idea, and the theme through each of the puzzles in the game, is to adjust a number of mirrors thus directing a beam of light from one part of the TV screen to hit a target on the opposite side. If all the time in the world was available to think and try all mirror permutations then the challenge would be easy. To add to the pressure, and to increase the number of beads of sweat trickling down your cheek, Costa has audaciously introduced a timer and the target has to be hit before it counts down to zero. Frustrating, compelling but highly addictive – *Deflektor* is another Costa Panyai Spectrum game that goes onto the list of all time classics.



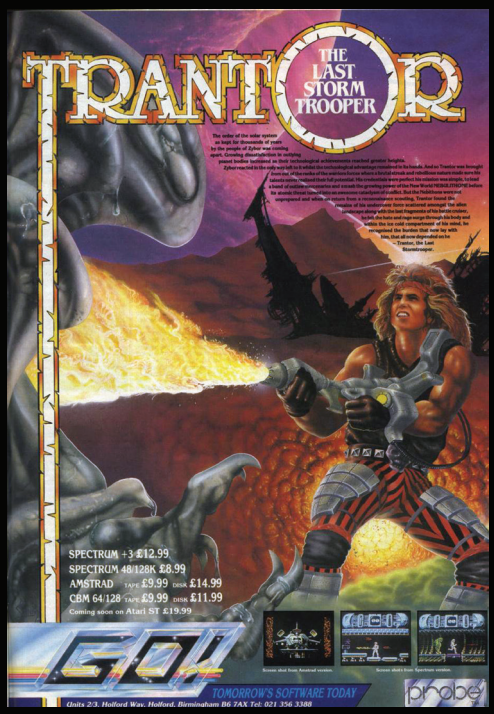
ACTIVISION
HOME COMPUTER SOFTWARE

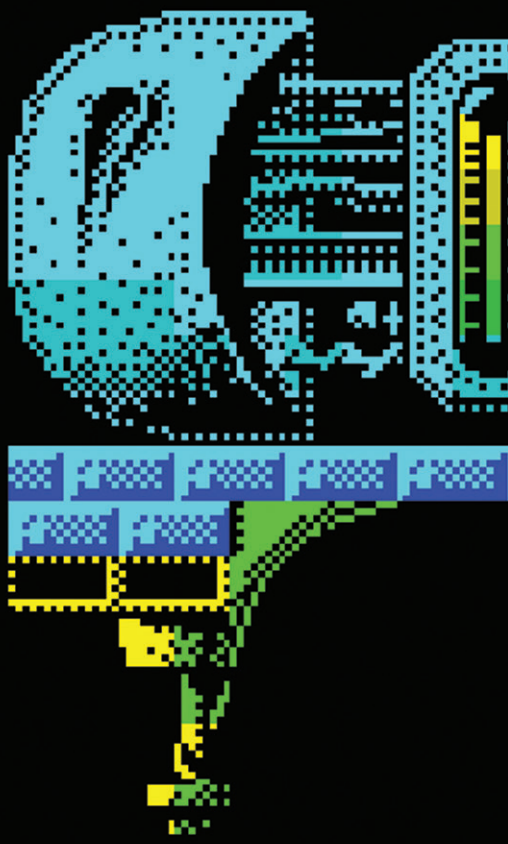
Name	:	Enduro Racer
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Activision
Author	:	Alan Laird, Ian Morrison



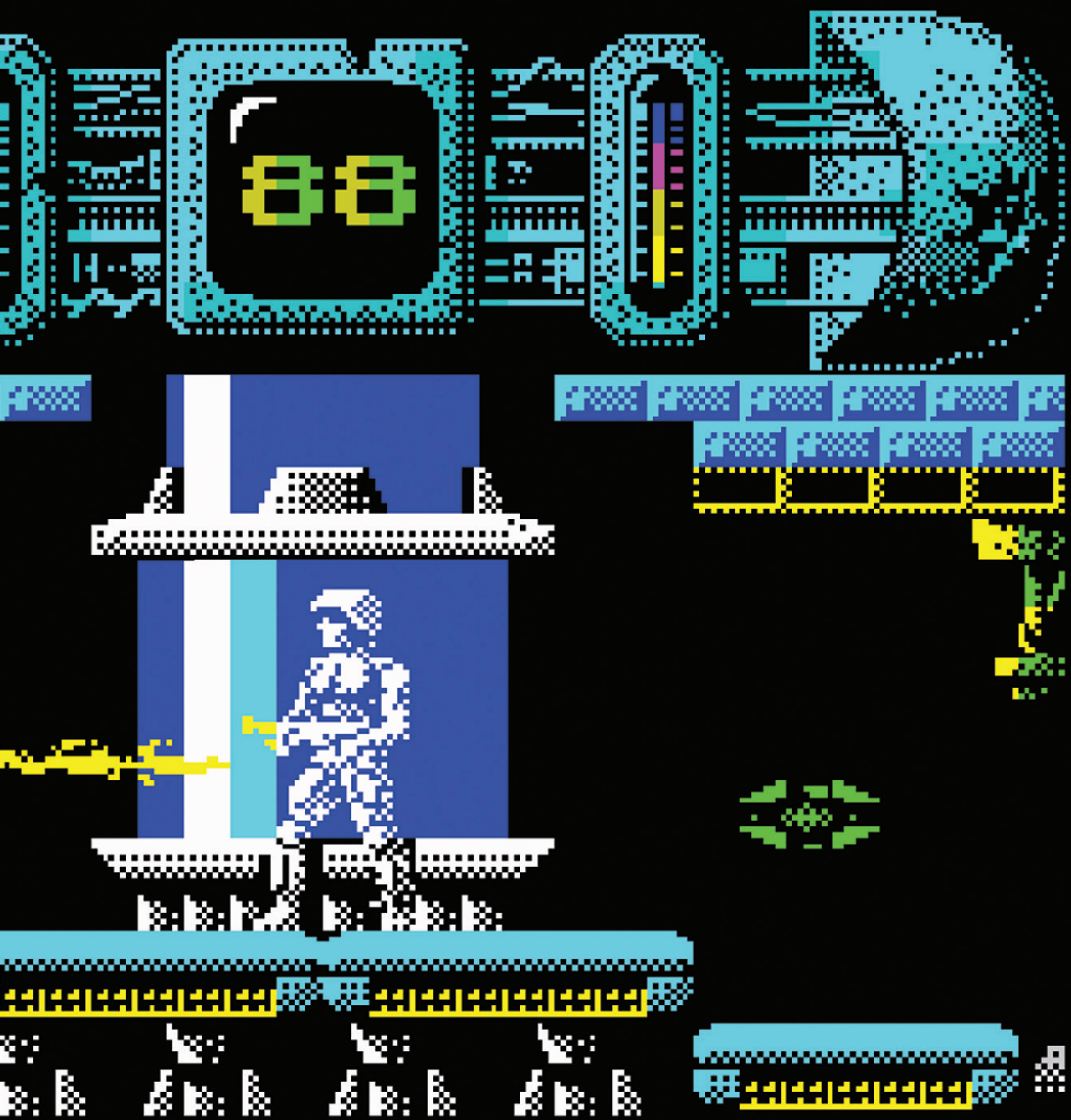
Activision had a variable output on the ZX Spectrum; with *Enduro Racer* it came from nowhere to deliver an excellent arcade racing game that is also vastly superior to the rival Commodore 64 version, making it a good name to bring up in bragging competitions. Based on the popular Sega arcade game, *Enduro Racer* is a dangerous motorcycle race set across five courses, with the task to complete each course in the fastest possible time while avoiding fellow bikers and obstacles. Each stage has its own graphical style and impediments from a tree-lined country road laden with bumps (which must be wheelied over to avoid losing speed) to a desert course complete with a lethal rockfall. Converting the fast-paced arcade game to the Spectrum was a brave move by Activision, but one that paid off handsomely. *Enduro Racer* is a graphically striking racer with big, well-defined sprites and gameplay that offers plenty of thrills. The only downside is a slightly annoying in-game tune.

Name	:	Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Go!
Author	:	David Quinn, Nick Bruty, Alan Tomkins, David Whittaker

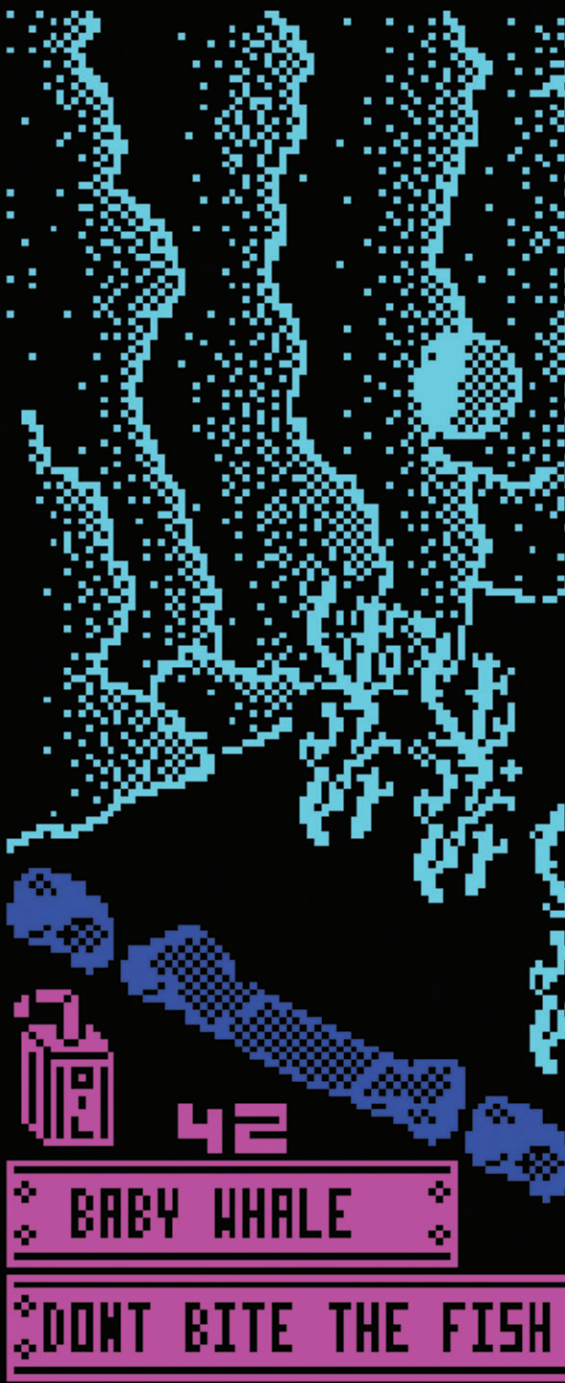




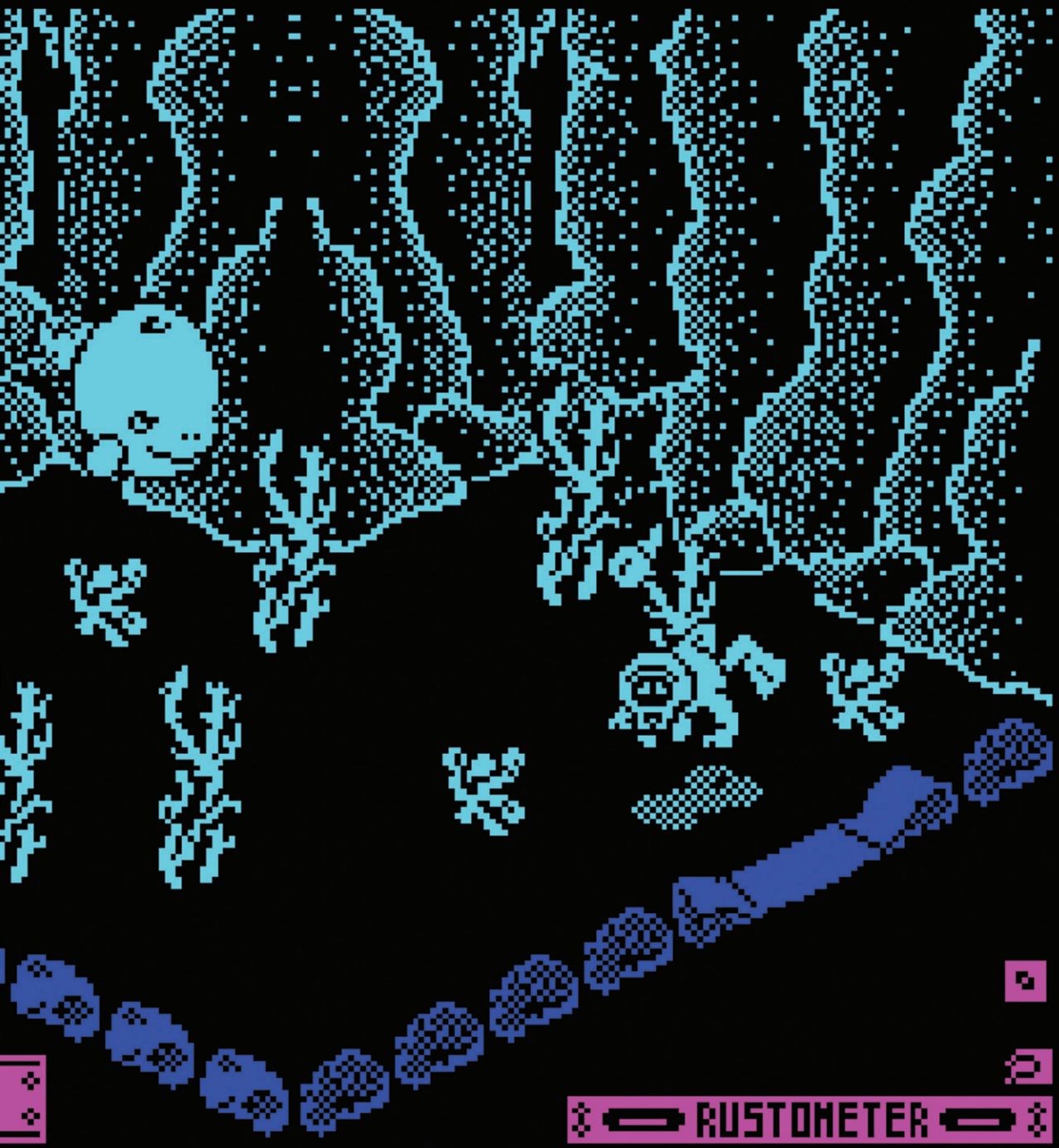
Bigger, superbly animated graphics are the starring attraction in *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper*. Oh, where to begin! Okay, so this unusual shooter takes its name from two of sci-fi's biggest offerings. Star Wars, obviously, but also from Isaac Asimov's seminal hardcore science fiction franchise Foundation, where the central planet is called Trantor. The game drops the player into a corridor overrun with all manner of murderous robots and aliens, which can be spectacularly dispatched with your trusty flamethrower. Ammo is limited, but refuelling stations are not too far apart. The difficulty is found in the strict time limit before a bomb goes off, so stopping to refuel your 'thrower all the time is not that advisable. As you sprint around the looping platforms and move between levels, you are charged with finding letters and solving a code, thereby diffusing the ever-ticking bomb. As noted by some reviews of the day, the gameplay is pretty simple and superficial, but the action is intense.



Name	:	Hydrofool
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Faster Than Light
Author	:	Roy Carter, Greg Follis, Rob Hubbard

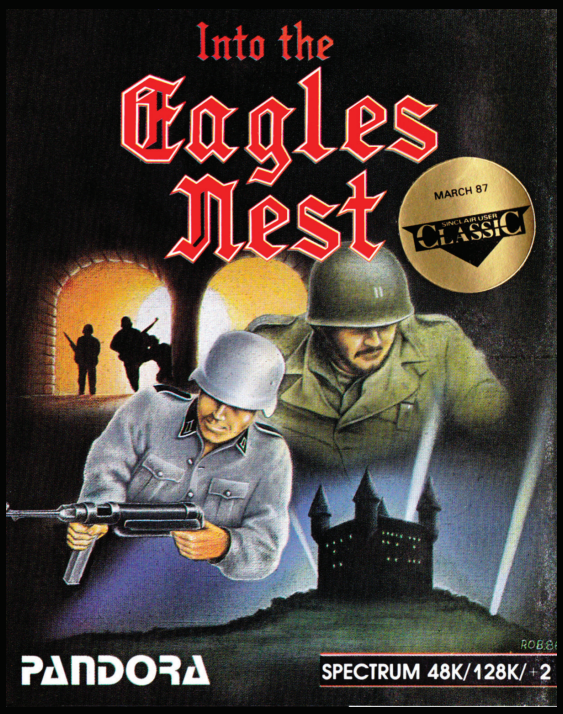


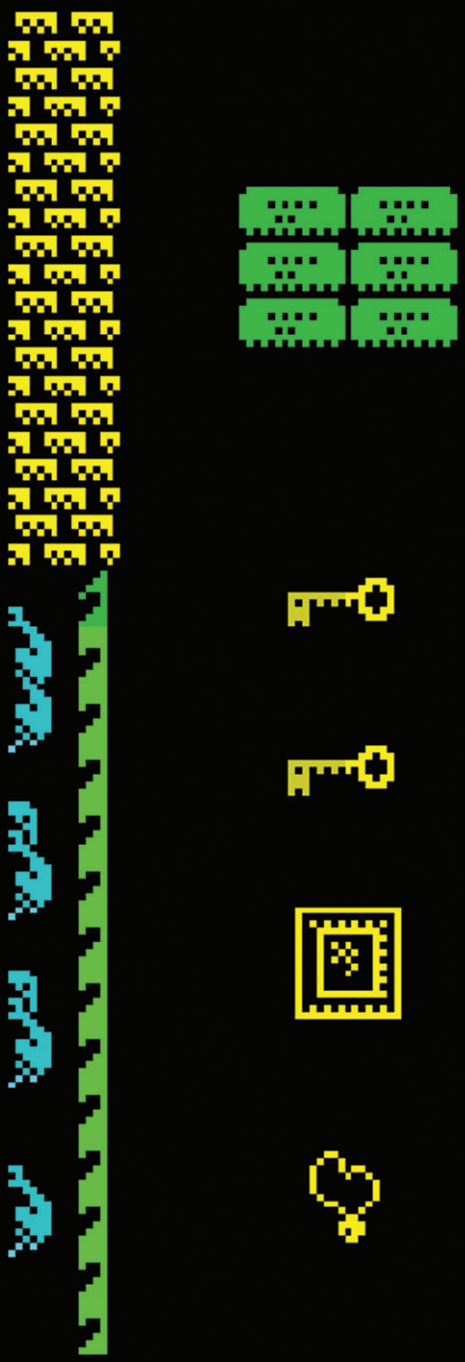
It's amazing the difference a great tune can make to a game – playing the 128K version of *Hydrofool* with its hypnotic, boppy, up beat Rob Hubbard track playing loudly in the background lifts this underwater, isometric game to a new level – with the music the game has 'depth', without it, it is a 'shallow' experience. For anyone who has played *Sweevo's World*, *Hydrofool* is effectively the same game with Sweevo and his diving gear in tow – here you have to explore a monochromatic flip screen aquarium full of nasty marine animals called the Deathbowl. Weapons are scattered around that can be picked up to deal with these annoyances as you search for four plugs to pull to drain away the water from the heavily polluted landscape. The game has a huge map with 200 caverns, and even more on the 128K version. A persistent, talented diver is required to finish this game and avoid getting the bends.



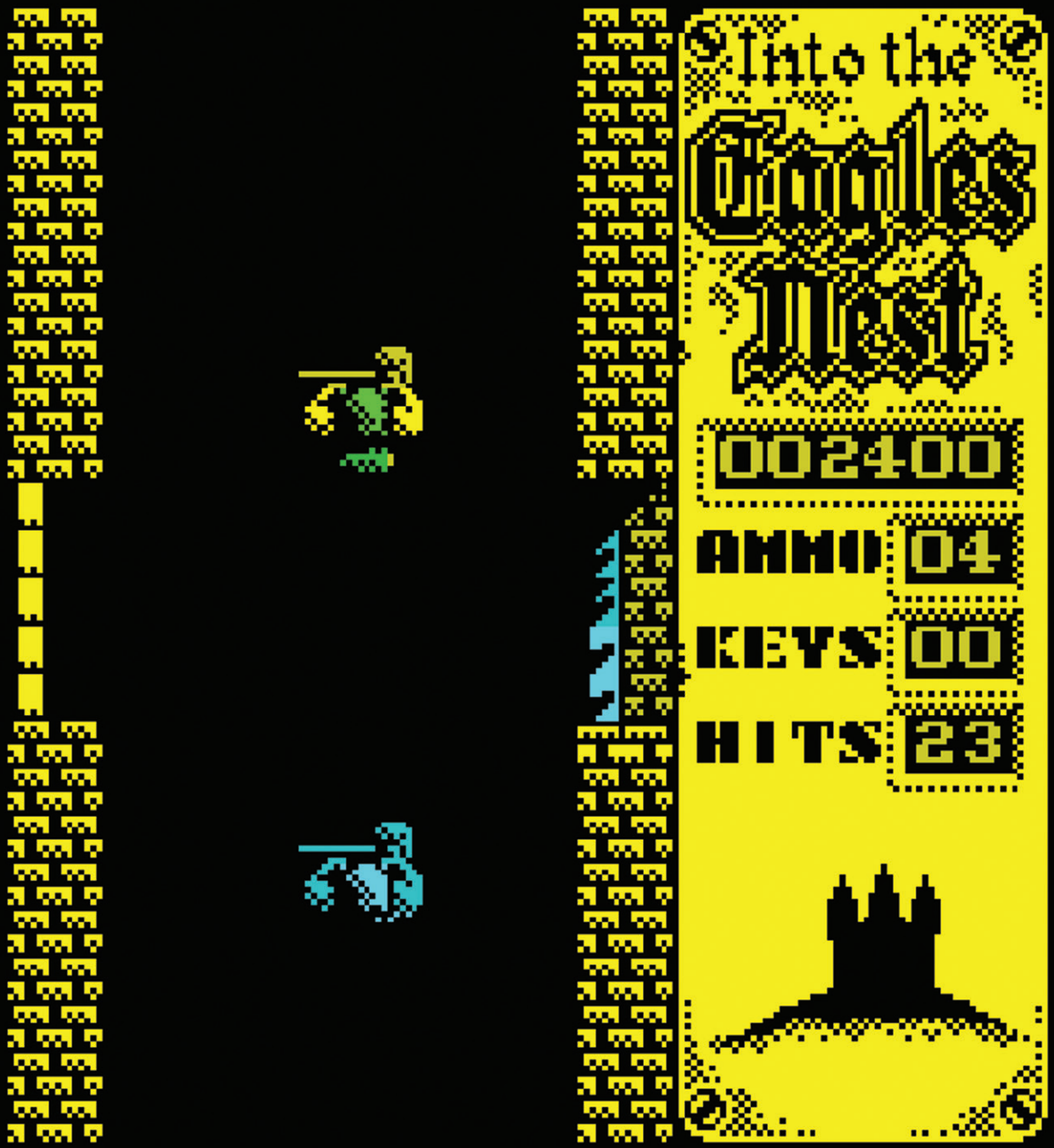
PANDORA

Name	:	Into The Eagle's Nest
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Pandora
Author	:	Kevin Parker, Robin Chapman



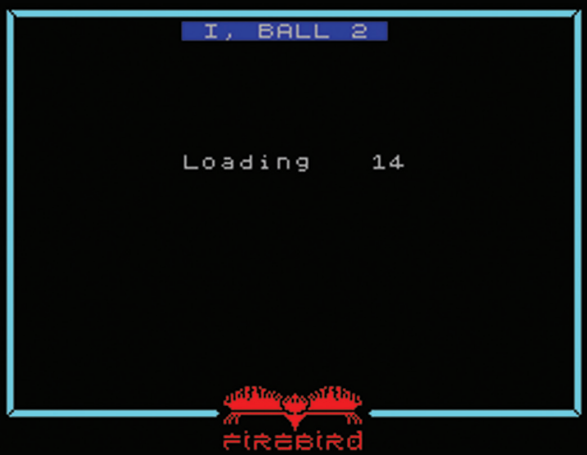


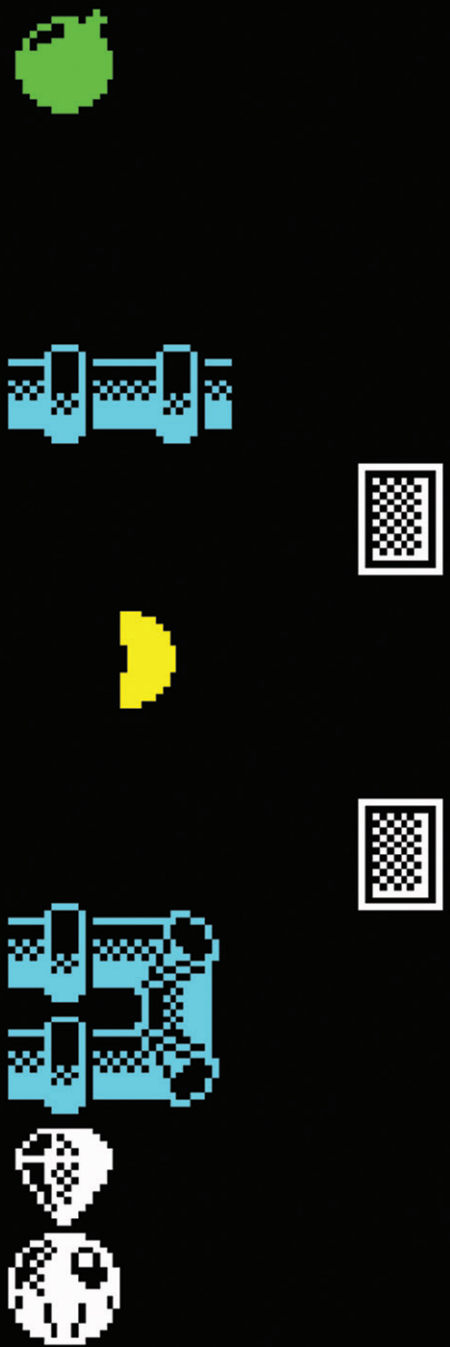
Pandora was a sub-label from Hampshire-based Interceptor, who never enjoyed the best reputation on the ZX Spectrum. Pandora's original purpose was to be a home for 16-bit games, although this one title sneaked onto the 8-bits in 1987. As was inevitably pointed out by critics at the time, *Into The Eagle's Nest* is a *Gauntlet* clone. Following (and before) the release of the official arcade game conversion by US Gold, the market had become predictably awash with top down shooters, although none employed a World War 2 setting as *Eagle's Nest* did. Taking on the mantle of a brave saboteur, the player's duty was to infiltrate the titular castle, rescue imprisoned colleagues and finally blow the place sky high (hopefully escaping at the same time). Naturally, in your path stood an army of Nazi soldiers, all with an eagle eye and itchy trigger fingers. *Into The Eagle's Nest* isn't a complex game, but it plays very smoothly and makes a welcome change in a genre that had become swamped with stereotypical sword and sorcery efforts. The gameplay is complemented with some neat and colourful graphics; just don't shoot those fuel barrels!



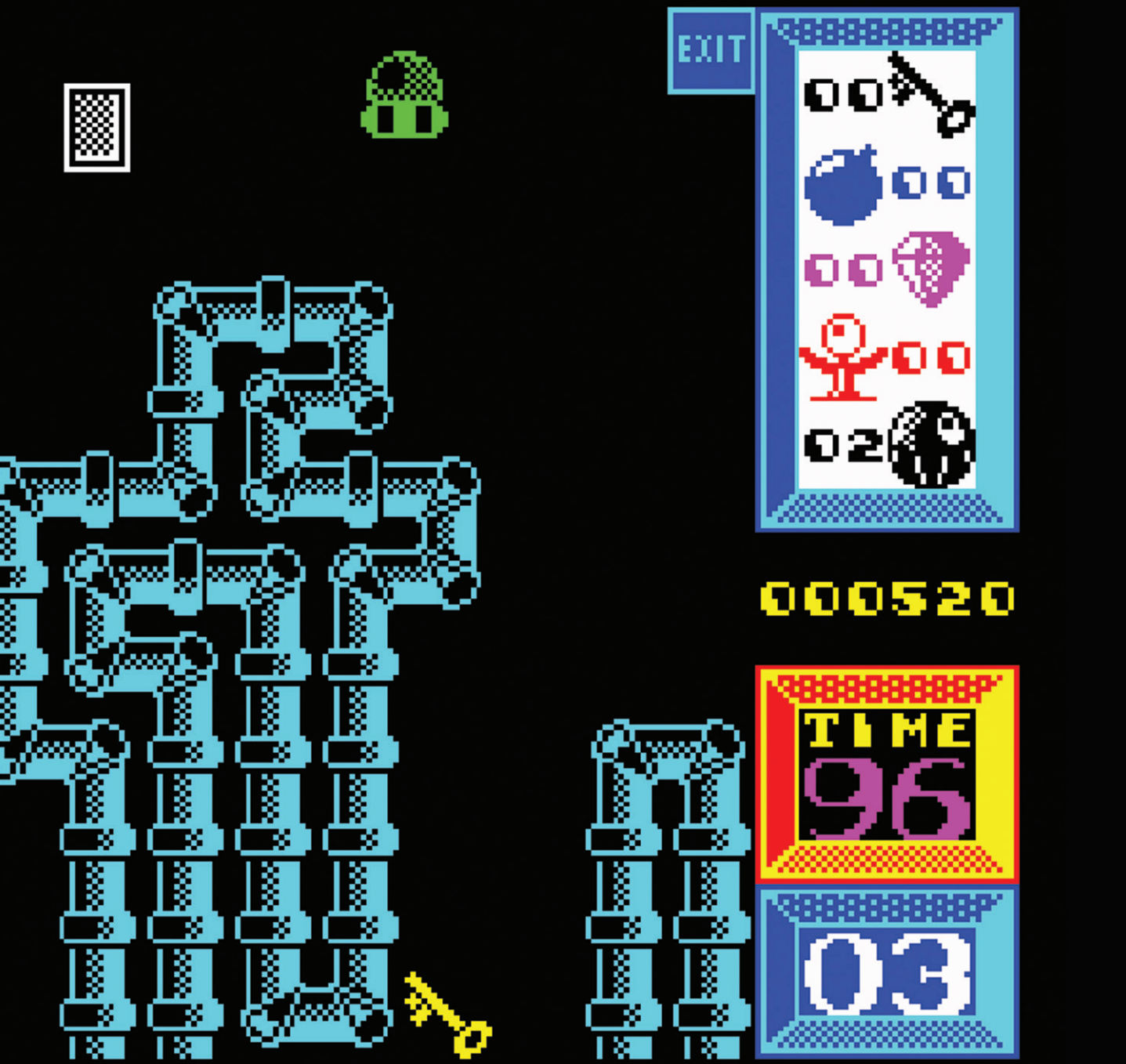
Name	:	I Ball II
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Firebird
Author	:	Timothy Closs

C. Green, Karen Trueman



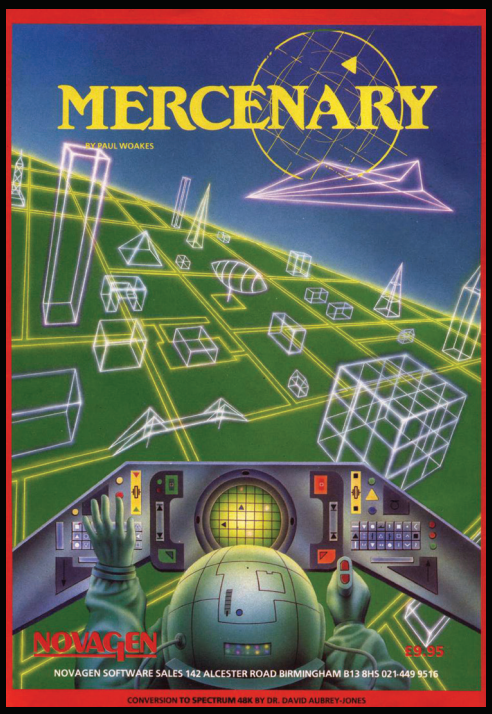


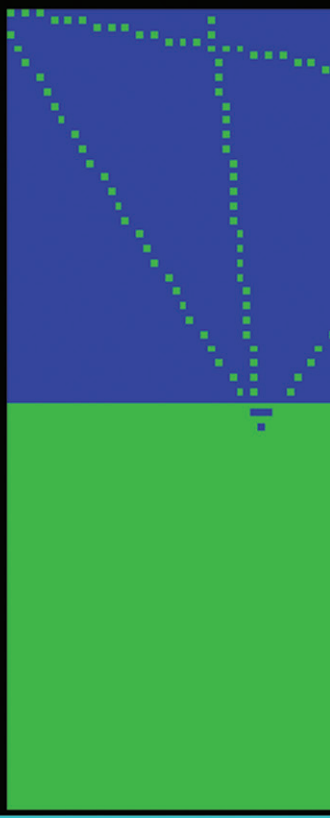
Everything the Spectrum did was an achievement, given the basics of the technology at hand, but even then it was never really known for its audio prowess. *I, Ball II* rewrote our expectations for the Speccy, however, and was one of the talkiest games of the 1980s. Constantly shouting the game's name as you rolled around the screen trying to solve the dexterous puzzles each level presented in an effort to make it to the exit, *I, Ball II* also exhibited gameplay characteristics that are still impressive today. Primarily, the spherical main character had a strong physics engine powering his movements. This meant you had to be extra careful when jumping around the platforms, as it was easy to overshoot and roll right off into an oncoming enemy. The puzzles were equally brilliant in their design, requiring sharp shooting, skilful control and a keen eye for well-hidden solutions. An unbearably addictive game in every respect, fuelled by coding that was way ahead of its time.

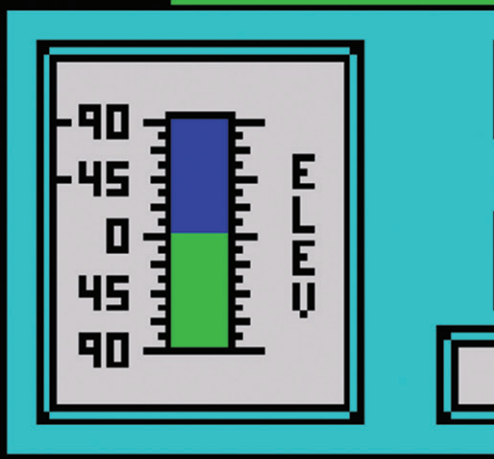


NOVAGEN

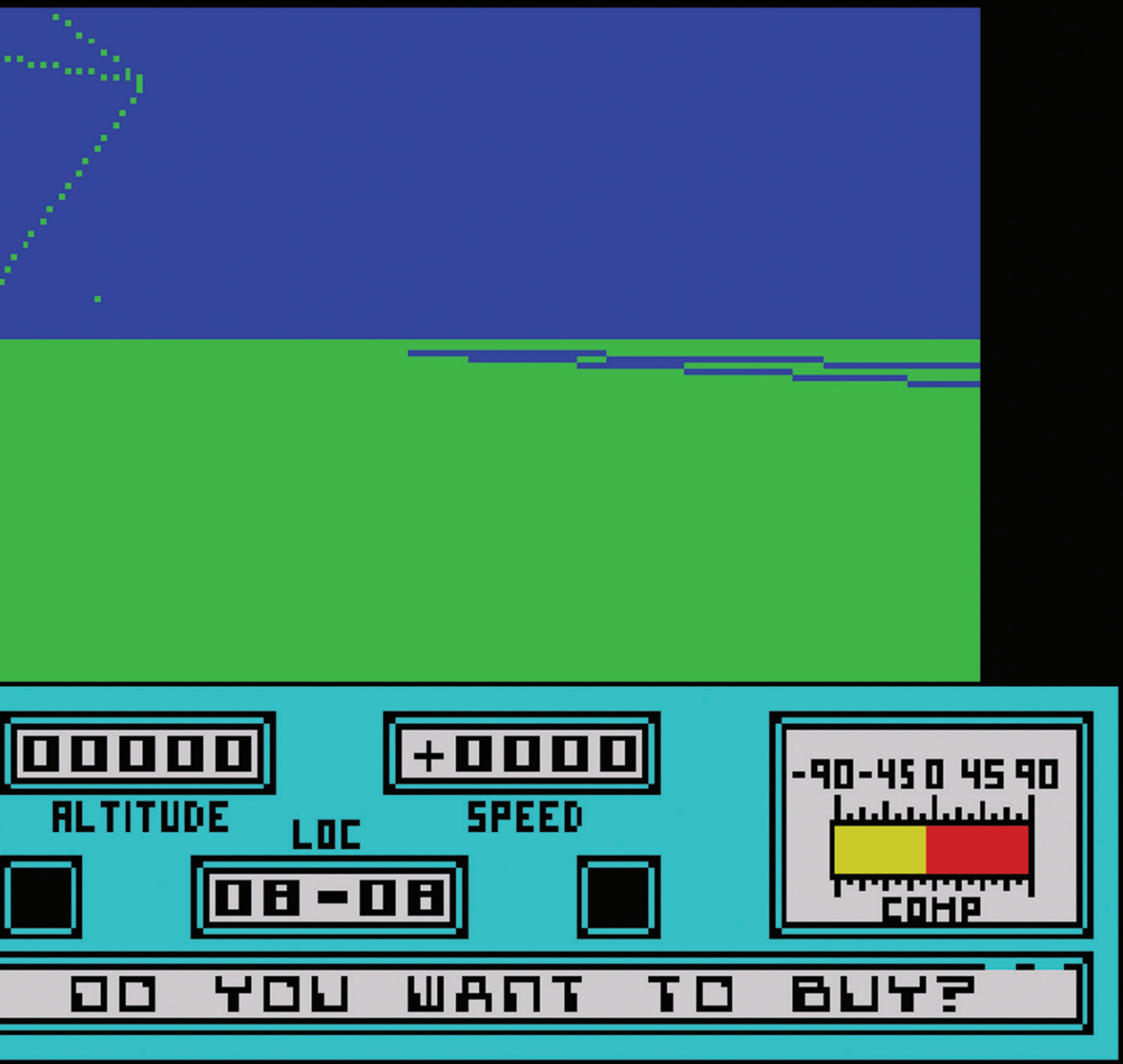
Name : Mercenary
Year : 1987
Publisher : Novagen Software Ltd
Author : David Aubrey-Jones, Paul Woakes



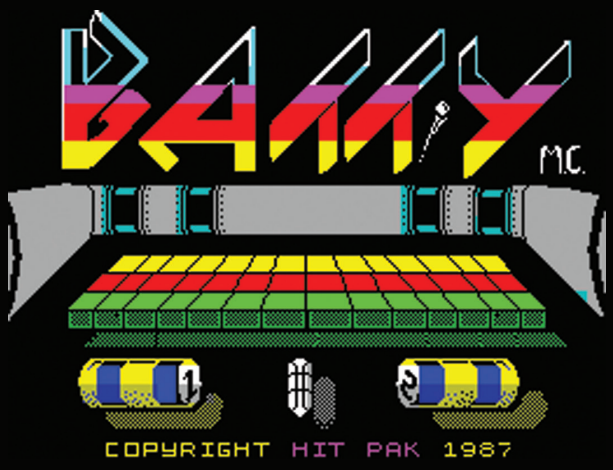




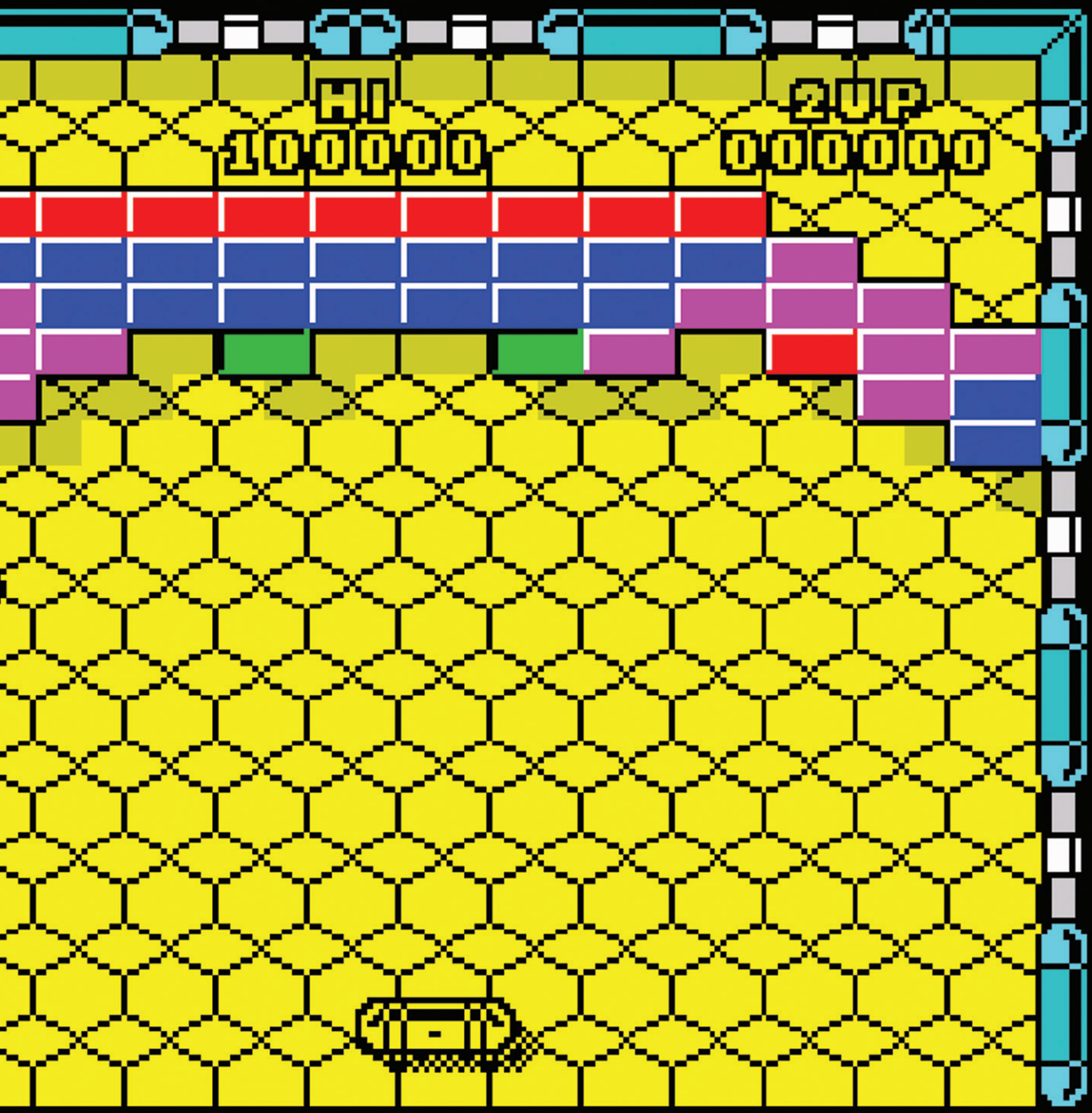
David Aubrey-Jones was behind the Speedlock protection system that aimed to restrict hackers and pirates. Yet after he helped lock down the system he coded this 3D masterpiece that expanded the limits of what players thought possible on the Spectrum. This was one of the first games to present a 'real' world for you to explore. And not just trudge about, à la Freescape, but soar around in an aircraft if you so wanted. It really felt like a vast city had been shoehorned into the Spectrum, with buildings and bridges and tunnels. Of course it was a conversion job – the game was originally developed by Paul Woakes for the Atari 8-bit. This was no straight port however, as Aubrey-Jones spent a year converting the game and making sure it tapped the speed potential of the Z80. The result was a fast, smooth conversion that set the standard for expansive adventures on the Spectrum. And when it was over you could up sticks to 'The Second City'…

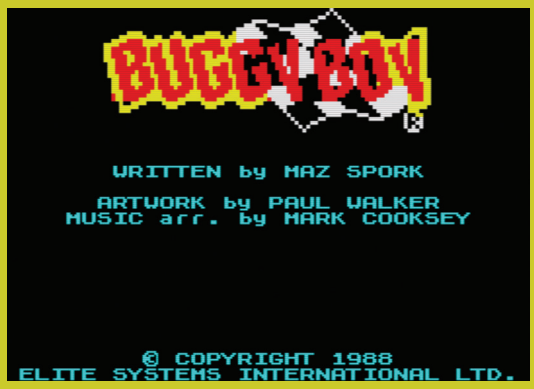


Name	:	Batty
Year	:	1987
Publisher	:	Hit-Pak
Author	:	Mark Crane

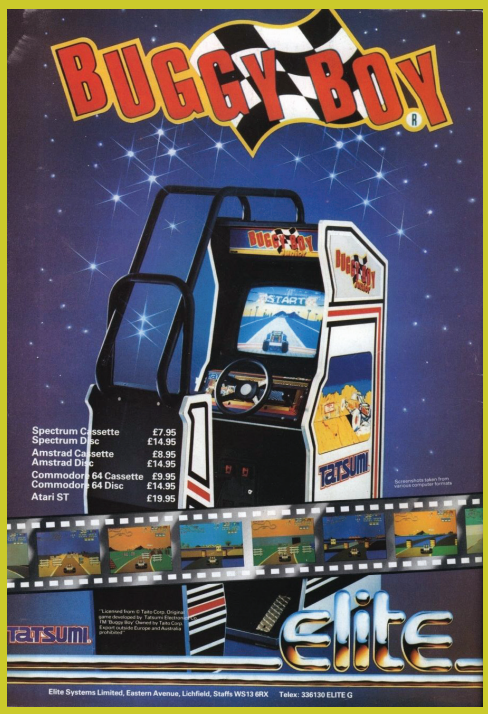


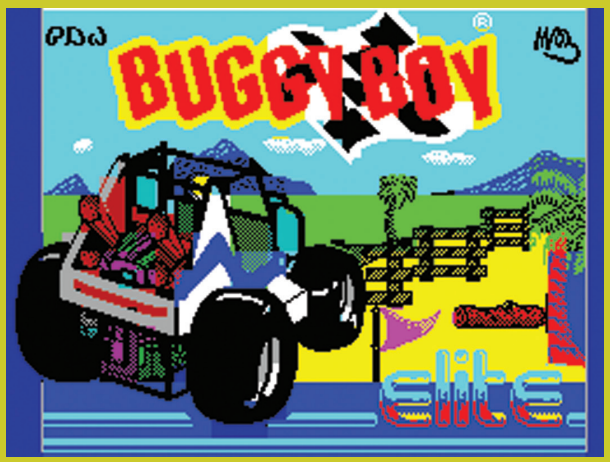
Nothing great in life is free so my mother used to say to me, so when there was a headline on the latest issue of Your Sinclair magazine in October 1987 advertising a free game on the cover cassette called *Batty* – well let's say I did not hold my breath. On loading up *Batty* for the first time and giving the game a first play, it was clear that the title was an *Arkanoid* clone, not a 'Care Home Simulator' full of batty cronies thinking their name was Derek. And boy, what a great *Arkanoid* clone this game was with bright hi-res colourful graphics and power-ups and level designs that give a huge wink and a nod to the arcade original. Rumour has it the boys and girls at Ocean were a little upset after seeing *Batty* as it was so much better than their *Arkanoid* conversion on the Imagine label. I had to go back to mother by the way to correct her erroneous assertion – some things that are free are beyond great!





Name	:	Buggy Boy
Year	:	1988
Publisher	:	Elite Systems
Author	:	Maz H. Spork, Paul D. Walker, Mark Cooksey



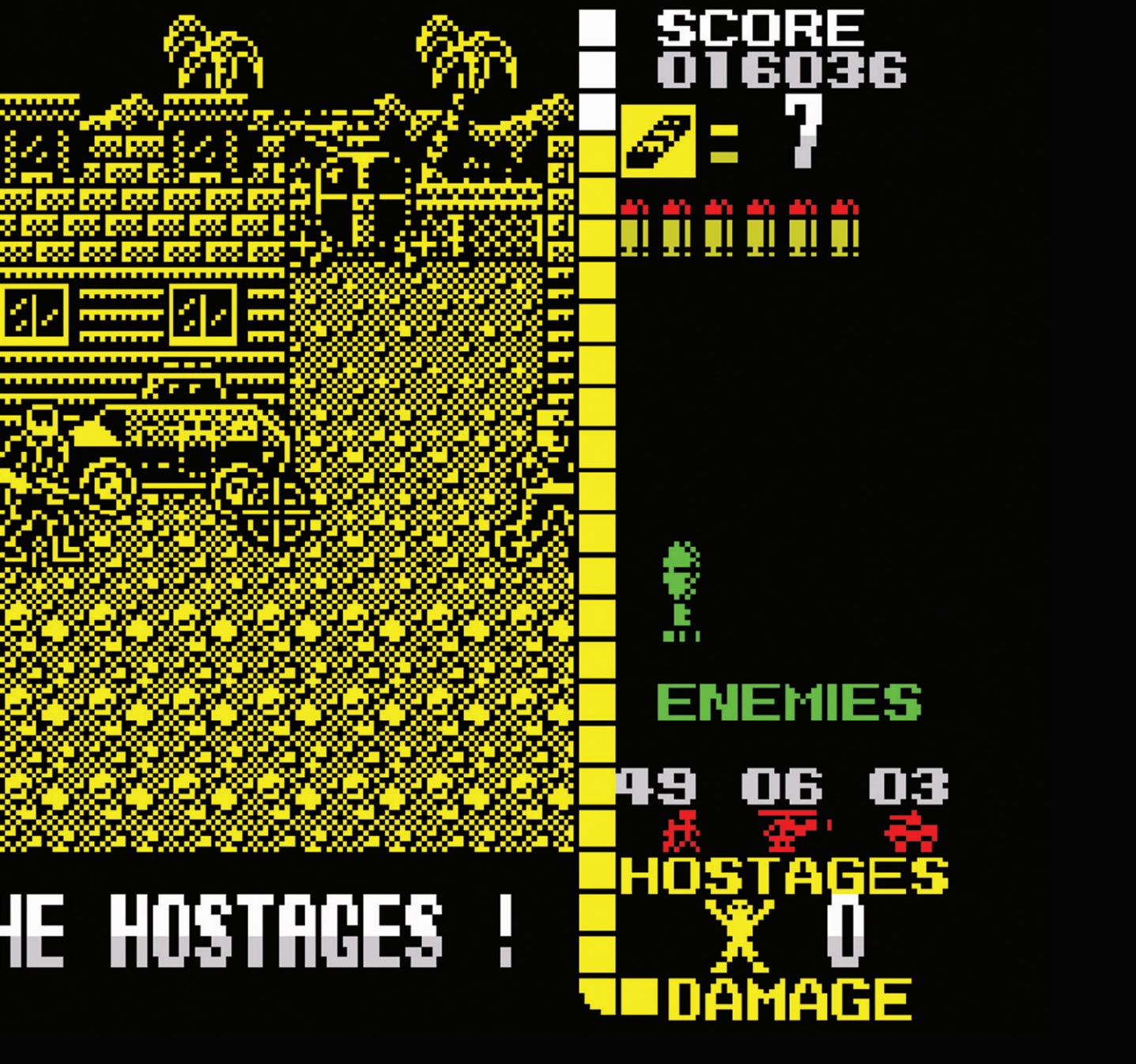


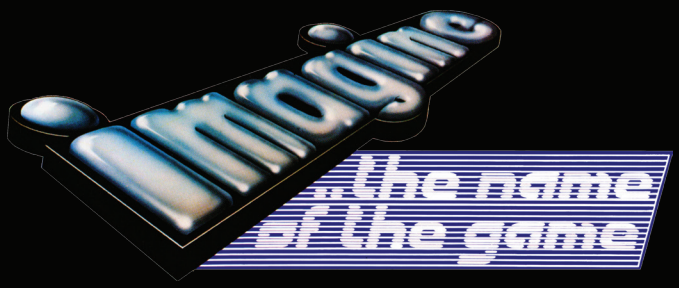
Coin-op conversions were big business back in the day, although 'conversions' is the wrong word – coin-op interpretations is probably better. Huge compromises were typically made to recreate the latest arcade behemoth on our modest 8-bits, but it was something we expected and accepted. It seems that nobody explained this to the guys behind the Spectrum version of *Buggy Boy*. The Tatsumi coin-op was an imposing racer (the deluxe cab featured three monitors), yet visually the Spectrum version is admirably close, featuring a massive colourful main buggy and loads of chunky sprites. If Don Priestley of *Popeye* and *Trap Door* fame had written a racing game it would have surely looked like this. Sadly in motion *Buggy Boy* is on the sluggish side; a racing game stuck in second gear. For a different approach see the Commodore 64 version which was reimagined with smaller graphics and is arguably better than the coin-op. But for a brave attempt that really does try and imitate the look of the coin-op, the Spectrum version has to be admired.

Name	:	Operation Wolf
Year	:	1988
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Andrew P. Deakin, Ivan Horn, Jonathan Dunn

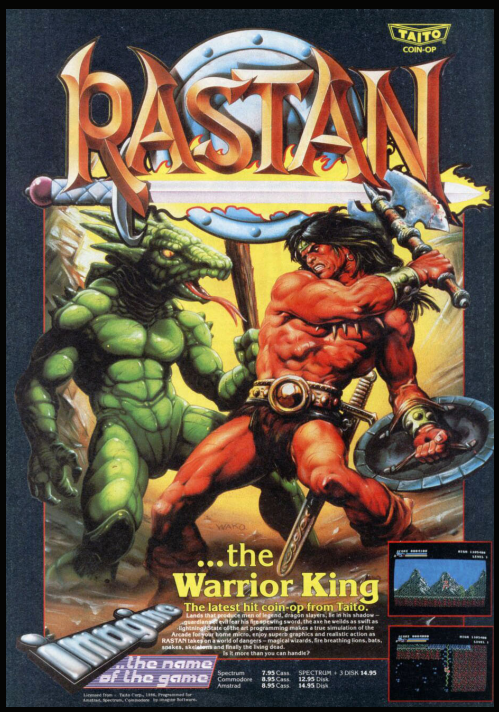
RESCUE T

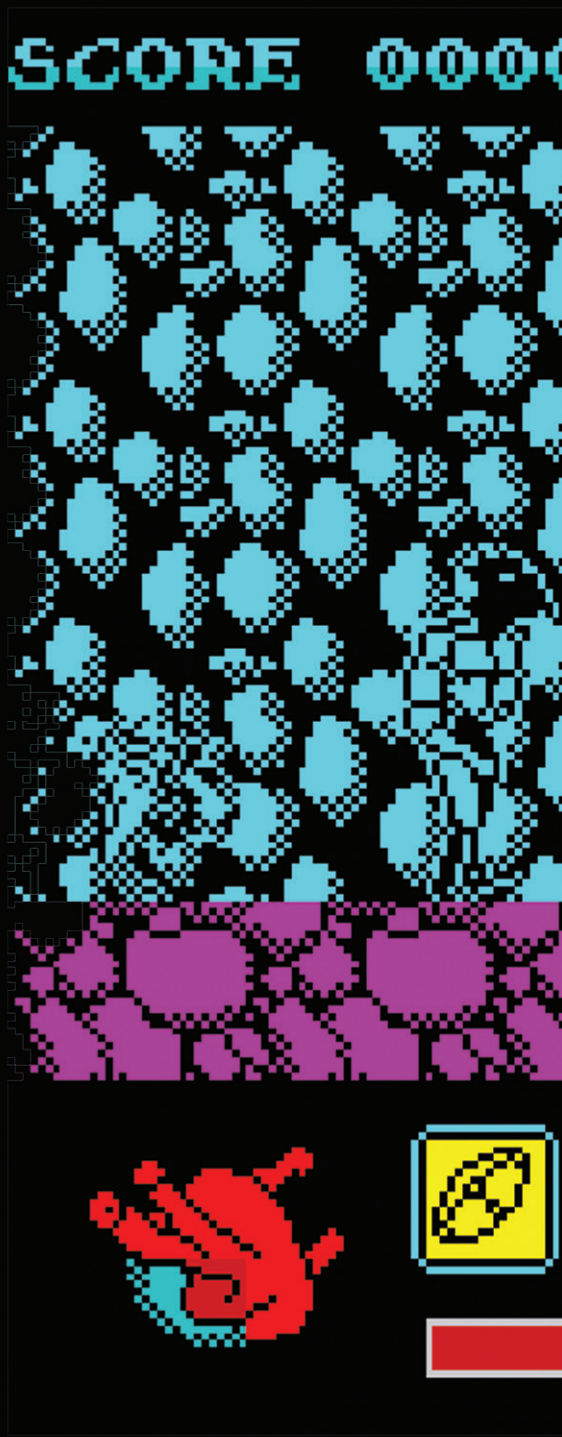
Operation Wolf (or 'Op Wolf' if you were cool) was one of the first arcade games to include the exciting add-on of a gun peripheral, mounted securely to the cab. The shooter was a huge hit and home versions were inevitable. Manchester's Ocean duly acquired the license and set about porting the game to the ZX Spectrum among others; Ocean's coders and graphic artists did a pretty good job too. Although in monochrome, *Operation Wolf's* graphics are sharp and the game scrolls nicely. In an age when the first-person shooter was rare, the gameplay was refreshing, although of course the Spectrum version lacks the arcade's gun peripheral. The game did support the Speccy's Magnum Light Gun but in all honesty the keyboard is probably a better option. Plot-wise it's typical lone soldier nonsense reminiscent of *Green Beret* and its peers; parachute behind enemy lines, wipe out the enemy soldiers, avoid shooting innocent nurses and rescue the captives. *Operation Wolf* is rock hard like many Spectrum games, but huge fun nonetheless.



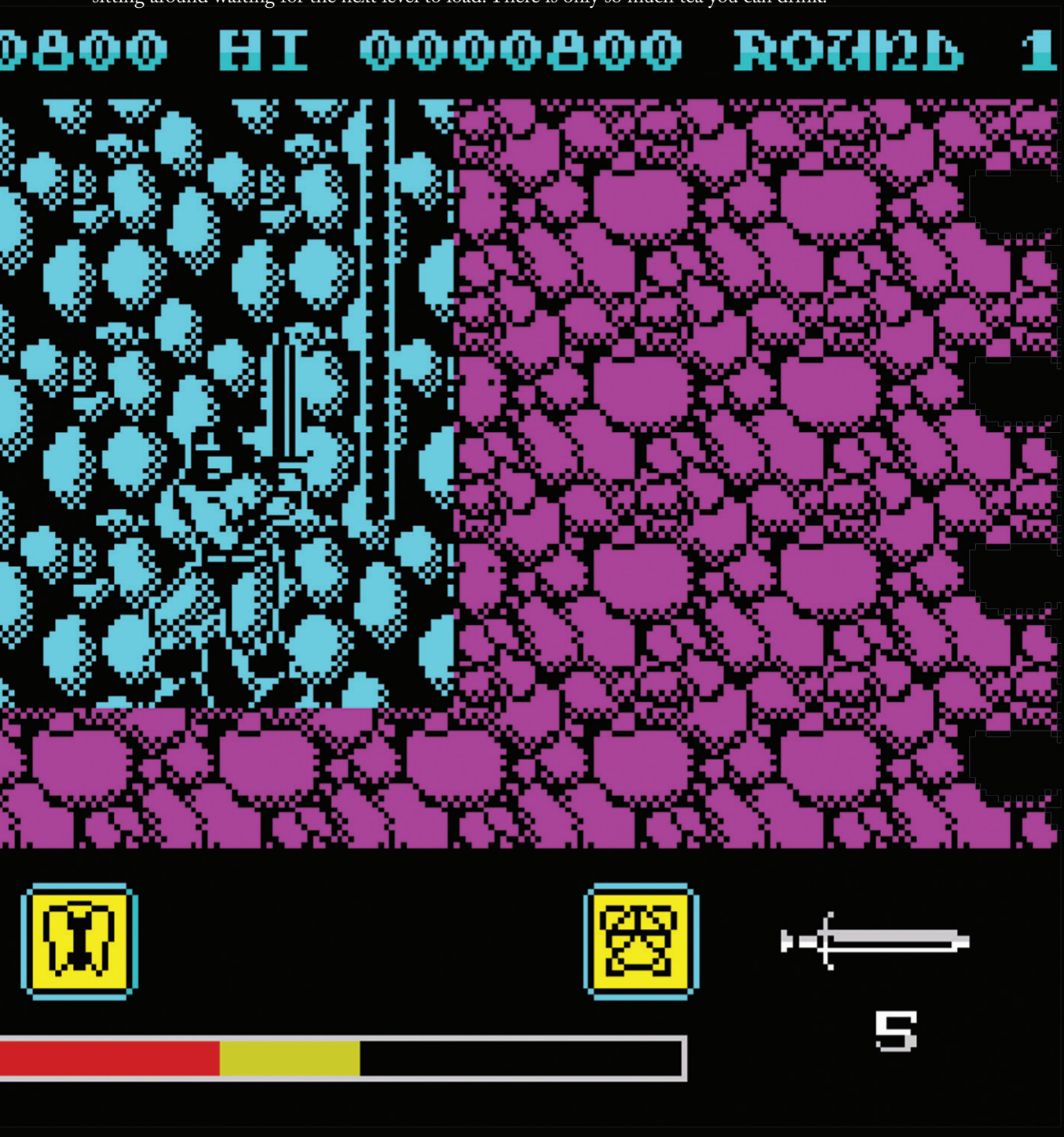


Name	:	The Rastan Saga
Year	:	1988
Publisher	:	Imagine Software
Author	:	Tom Lanigan, Paul Murray, Jas C. Brooke, Ed Knight

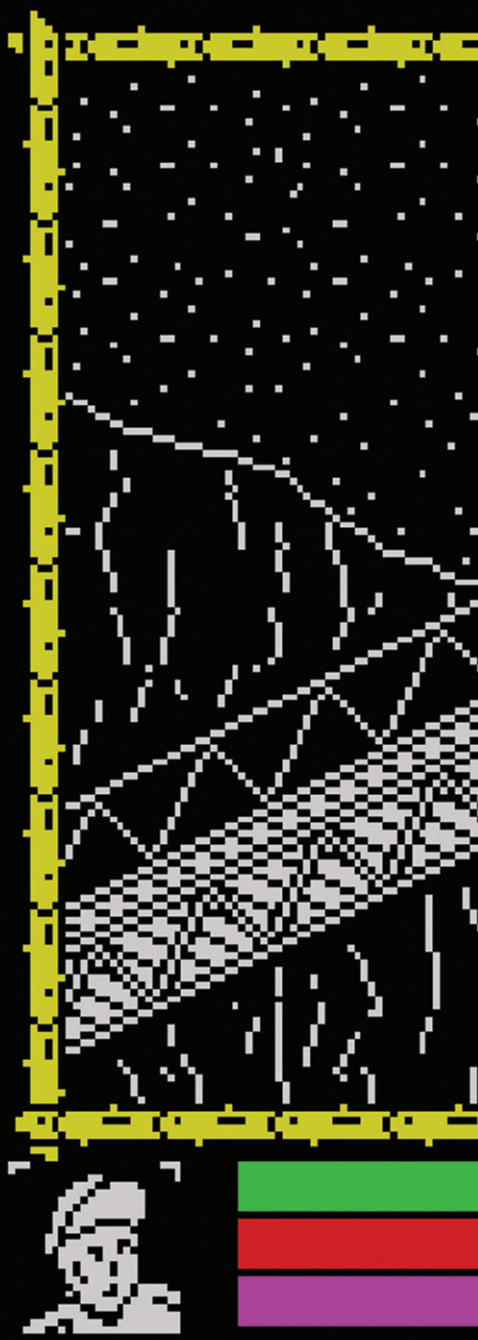




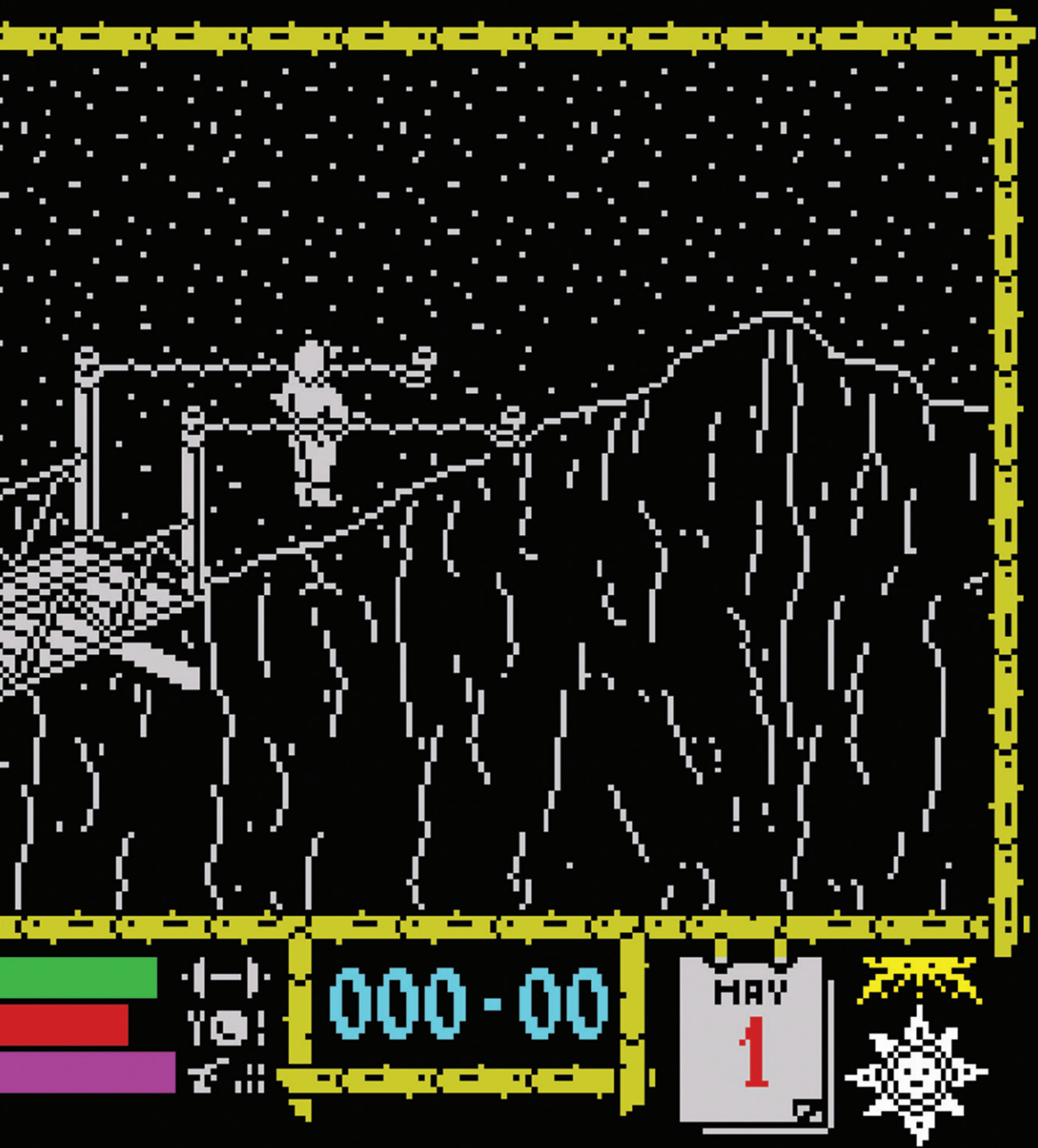
The original Taito coin-op is an entertaining if somewhat run-of-the-mill hack and slash effort. Influenced heavily by the classic tales of Conan The Barbarian, the player takes on the role of the title character who must chop and cleave his way through several regions of the planet Maranna which has been invaded by a horde of detestable monsters. These creatures are controlled by an evil wizard named Karg who seeks revenge on the barbarian king. On the Spectrum the game is mainly monochrome, although colour is used well for areas outside of the main sprites. The graphics are sharply-defined, especially many of the imaginative enemies, although sound is predictably poor. It plays well too, with the scrolling from left to right moving fast, and the main character's attacks feeling appropriately swift and heavy. *Rastan* did attract one big criticism at the time which was common for games released in the late-Eighties: it utilised a multi-load system which often interrupts the action and leaves the player sitting around waiting for the next level to load. There is only so much tea you can drink.



Name	:	Where Time Stood Still
Year	:	1988
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Denton Designs (John Heap, Fred Gray)

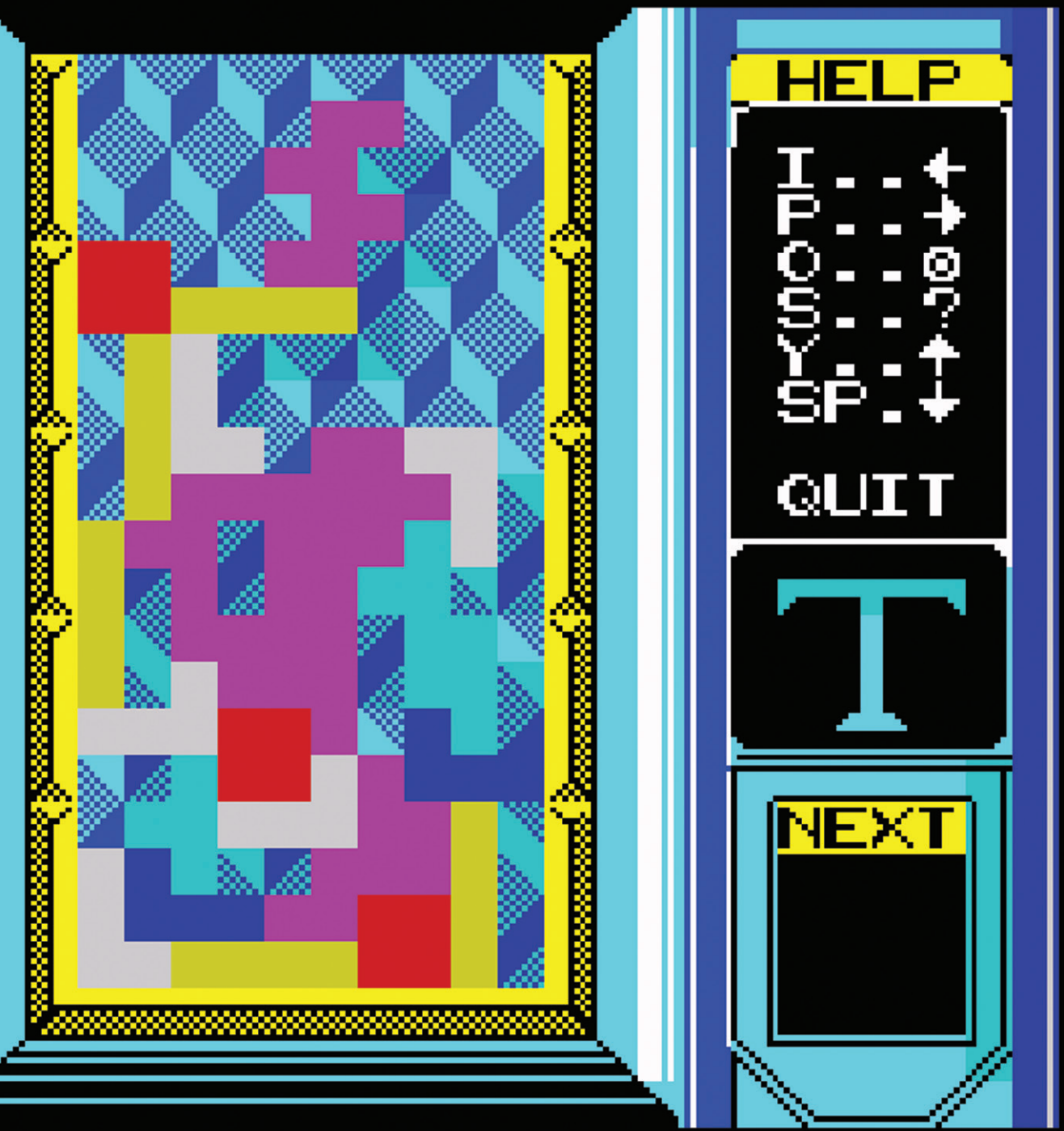


A plane crashes onto a mysterious land and amazingly all the passengers get out of the wreckage unscathed. After the relief of walking from the downed aircraft, there is a realisation that things are not as they should be and constant threats in the form of cannibals, dinosaurs and sea monsters become the norm. The aim is to work together as a group and find a way home and it is your role, as the leader Jarret, to make that dream a reality. The land is littered with helpful objects to aid you in your journey ranging from guns to first aid kits. A series of status bars give an indication of the strength, hunger levels and ammunition of each team member – should they get too low the complaints start to come forward via speech bubbles. If immediate action is not taken, then it is quite easy to lose a team member. *Where Time Stood Still* is an unpredictable, absorbing adventure – one of the best on the ZX Spectrum.



Name	:	Tetris
Year	:	1988
Publisher	:	Mirrorsoft
Author	:	Andromeda Software Ltd, Peter Jones, David Whittaker

Tetris was made for the Spectrum. Yeah, yeah, it's been made for every computer and console ever released, but its design suits the Speccy's limited, blocky colour options beautifully. For a few wonderful hours, back in the day, you could believe that the Spectrum was as colourful as that new Amiga thing that just came out. Naturally there are a lot of versions. And we mean a lot. *Russian Tetris*, *Night Tetris*, *Mega Tetris*, *Master Tetris*, *Super Tetris*, *Tetris 2*, *Super Tetris 2*… the length of the list is ridiculous. This official Mirrorsoft version is about the best, however, and was released prior to the game's eruption to global fame brought on by the Nintendo Game Boy. The simplicity of its design is almost enough to put a lot of players off. But the astronomically – and consistently – high scoring reviews applauded the soundtrack and, naturally, the great gameplay. They quickly convinced us that this was a solid purchase, and *Tetris* earned itself a permanent place in the living rooms of the free west.

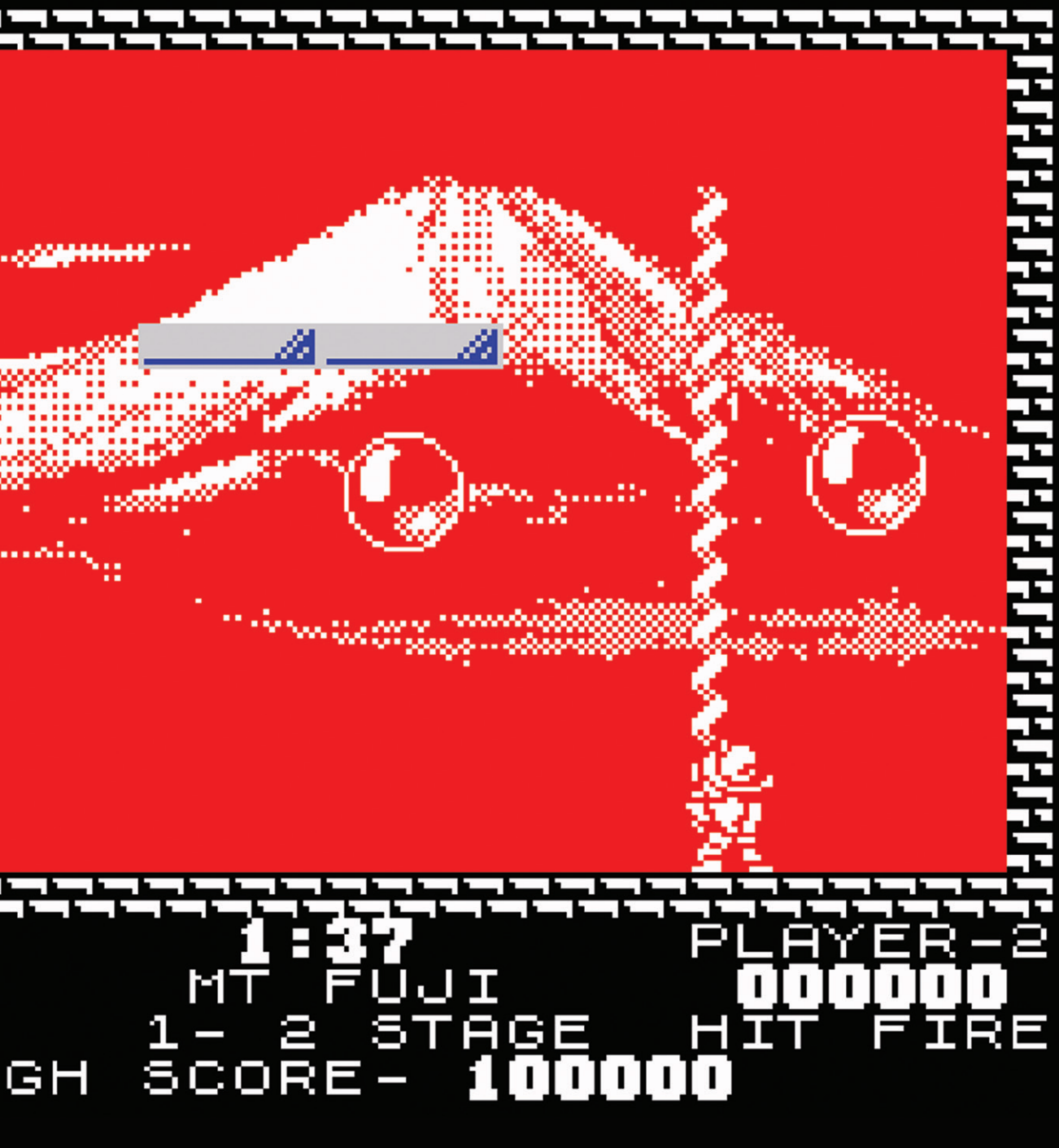


YOU MUST TRAVEL
THROUGH 17 NATIONS
OF THE WORLD

TO BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY
PRESS FIRE

Name	:	Pang
Year	:	1990
Publisher	:	Ocean Software
Author	:	Arc Developments

Only in 1980s Japan could a game like *Pang* have been conceived. Everything about it is quintessentially Japanese, from its manga-esque cut scenes to the crazy, effervescent characters and crackpot concept. Players are armed with an unusual type of harpoon, which shoots from the ground wherever the safari-clad main character is stood, and stops when it skewers the ceiling. It drags a rope along with it, and only disappears when one of the huge, bouncing bubbles makes contact, and pops. The bubble is then split into smaller bubbles that only bounce half as high, but move more quickly. Still with me? Good. So running beneath them gets harder and harder as you attempt to eliminate all the bubbles. If *Pang* had to be compared to any other game, it'd probably have to be *Asteroids,* but it's a loose comparison at best. All of which makes this wonderfully original and highly addictive game a total blast and a valuable retro classic. The Speccy version plays beautifully, and did the original coin-op proud. You need *Pang* in your retro collection.



The multi-colour Spectrum imagery of Issue 13 of Crash magazine by Oliver Frey.

THE MEMOIRS

Oli Frey

The covers of Crash magazine are loved as much as the content inside. Oli continually surprised his audience with imagery ranging from gory horror to space battles and alien beasts – his Christmas covers though remain the best loved.

The arrival of the ZX Spectrum changed the course of my professional career as much as it would affect many a programmer's and youthful games player's life. This elegant black box harboured a genie that, once unleashed, fired a revolution and the creation of a whole new strand of home entertainment.

For me, 12 years of drawing comic strips and producing illustrations for national children's publications from Fleetway War Picture Library, Speed & Power, Look and Learn to Eagle plus many books took a jarring swerve into the world of computers. As Roger Kean, my brother Franco and I embarked on the launch of Crash we didn't imagine quite how all-consuming this magazine and its later Newsfield stablemates would prove; soon, demand for covers and editorial art, plus the comic strip The Terminal Man meant that I had to give up any other illustration work – I became a full-time home computer games man!

The front cover of issue 21 of Crash magazine.

However brilliant the ZX Spectrum was, the games graphics left a lot to the players' imagination, with pixels hard put to generate atmosphere let alone convey a realistic view of a game's physical setting. When it came to a Crash cover, static screen shots were hardly likely to generate much excitement and therefore magazine sales. Like the software companies

on their inlays, we had to treat the games as if they were fully-fledged movies and hype their thrilling worlds on action-packed covers and illustrations that brought their stories to life. That's where my commercial art experience came in.

What I didn't have was any great ability at gameplay! I have to confess that I never got to derive great enjoyment from playing computer games; watching others battle their way through the varied scenarios is what inspired me and taught me to admire and respect just how much could be achieved with the ludicrously limited amount of memory available to ZX Spectrum games developers. What a clever, talented bunch of people, and what addictive excitement they created: the results were there to see in the players' rapt faces as they registered triumph or dismay at their progress, or failures. So, just watching a game played out on screen turned out to be very entertaining, and I kept abreast of most new releases that way. When it came to covers, editorial decided what they wanted to feature, after which ideas were thrown around as to how a game or genre would best be pictured.

The iconic Christmas cover of 1984 (Issue number 12).

One thing I'm proud of was playing Atic Atac through to the end for the map I drew!

For me the ZX Spectrum means Crash, and Crash meant getting to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of our young games-playing readers, and box-loads of letters spoke of their love of ZX Spectrum gaming. They sent high scores, cheats, program listings, maps, opinions and

'WHAT NOW' – Oli's front cover image of issue 4 of Crash magazine.

The covers of issue 8 and issue 38 of Crash magazine.

drawings of favourite characters – even personal versions of Crash covers! The magazine's interviews with programmers inspired many to have a go at designing their own games, which in many cases led to a later career in computing. It was amazing to witness 8-bit gaming spread through Britain like wildfire. Thanks to publications like Crash enjoying the games was not a lonely pastime: our letters pages made it a shared social event, and school playgrounds provided a further arena for games chat and comparison.

I'm grateful to the advent of the ZX Spectrum for all the years it and its following platforms kept me busy churning out hundreds of illustrations which seem to have thrilled many a young gamer, or so I'm told! I know they inspired some to pursue an illustrator's or graphic designer's career.

All this without getting addicted to keyboard or joystick fun…

A collection of Crash covers showing the different styles of imagery that Oli produced.

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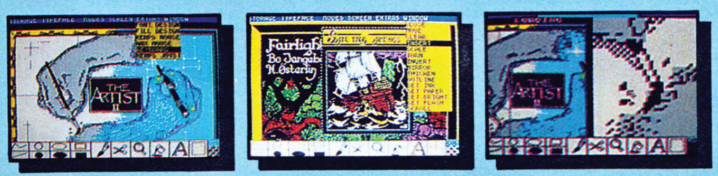

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Gari Biasillo

The music that accompanied the 128K version of *Target: Renegade* is regarded as one of the top tunes using the AY chip – Gari Biasillo made the Spectrum sing!

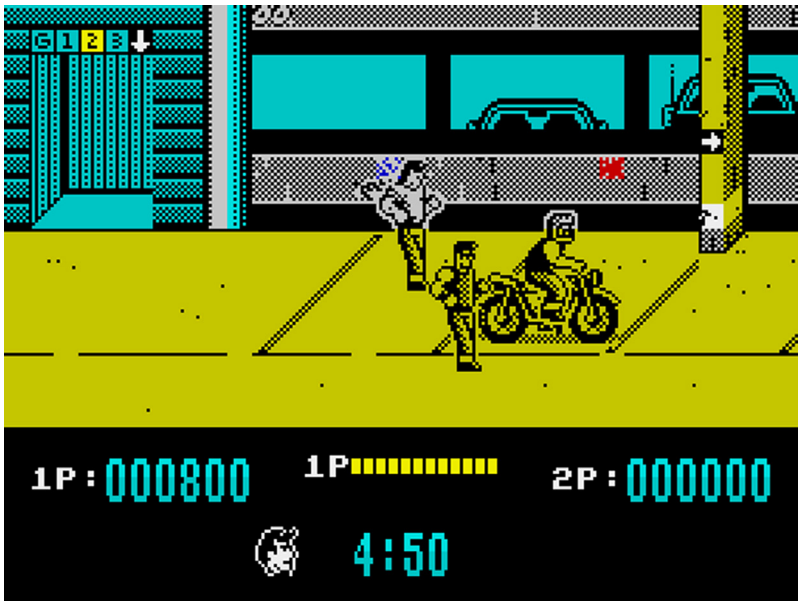
As a youth growing up in the 80s I experienced the growth of the home computer revolution in the UK, and to this day I have fond memories of that era. I spent many a weekend in Boots, WH Smiths, and the small computer store, Computer Link. It felt magical. Games could transform your world into an alternate reality of the past, present, or future. I never did own a ZX Spectrum – I was the proud owner of its fierce rival, the C64, but always had a soft spot for it. If I'd had the finances I would have surely purchased one but had to make do with playing it at one of my friends' or cousin's homes. The Spectrum always seemed to have more interesting and bizarre games, especially in the earlier years. It's tough to pick favourites but the games that stuck out for me were *Manic Miner*, *Ant Attack*, *Underwurlde*, *Back to Skool* and *Valhalla*. There are hundreds more I could mention if I had the space.

My journey into professional game development began with Interceptor Micros, where I attended an interview with a disk in hand containing a few demos. I was applying for a programmer's position but my demo disk included a music editor I had been programming, having a passion for music. I could hear the programmers who interviewed me whispering that they needed a composer, which landed me the job. My first task was to compose the music and sound effects for *Joe Blade*, which included the ZX Spectrum (beeper and AY versions).

Joe Blade – Gari produced the music for this game and demoed the track to Gary Bracey of Ocean Software.

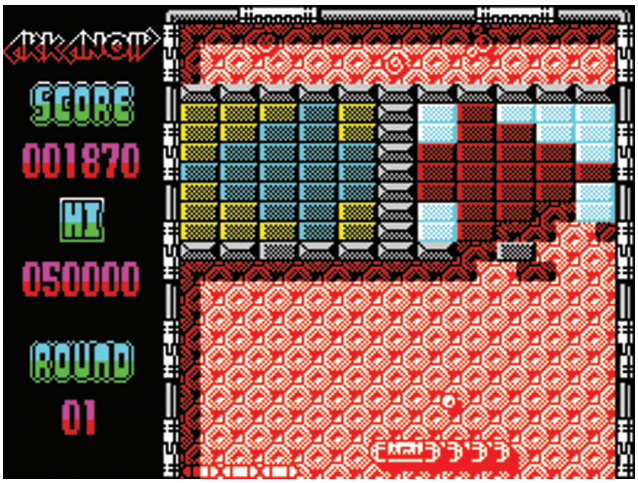
Interceptor's offices were located in the same industrial park as Thalamus, and as well as developing their own games on the second floor,

the first floor was used for printing and tape/disk duplication. As they duplicated tapes and disks for other games companies, we had direct access to a magnitude of games. The team running the duplication would do random tests of the games for QA but oddly enough TVs used to go missing. This led to them only being allowed to use computer monitors while the dev team ended up with low quality TVs! I would often take a detour to/from work to try and get a glimpse of the 8-bit legend Jeff Minter who lived close by. I never did but was fascinated to see llamas through a chain fence in his backyard!



Target: Renegade – the most famous musical track Gari produced on the Spectrum.

In late 1987, I joined Ocean after interviewing with Gary Bracey. I demoed the music to *Joe Blade*, and had a great chat with Martin Galway picking his brain over his sound design techniques for several of his songs. The first Spectrum project I worked on was *Arkanoid II*, which was mainly a port of the arcade game's music. It was challenging as Ocean only had a rudimentary music driver for the AY chip, and one of the programmers had to write some band-aid code to make it a little more usable. Following this, I was tasked with the sound for *Target: Renegade* for all 8-bit SKUs. This was a really enjoyable project and I was set on trying to create something different to the usual style of music found in games at that time, with melancholy and hopelessness as the main themes.



Ultimately, I ran out of time and produced less songs than I had hoped for, and in fact time was so tight that I had to enrol the help of Jon Dunn to port my Spectrum 128K AY music to the Spectrum 48K.

Sadly, this marked the end of my work on the Spectrum.

Arkanoid Revenge of Doh, published by Imagine Software in 1988.

David Lowe

Thrust, programmed by David on the ZX Spectrum was an instant classic when released back in 1986. He went on to work on *Starglider*, *Rasputin* and *Carrier Command*. The Spectrum started David off on a long career of producing music for games.

I had been a professional musician since leaving school in East London at 16 and had spent three years working every night all over the country, sleeping in the Transit, on beaches and even spent seven months sleeping in one room in a brothel, with three other members of the band!

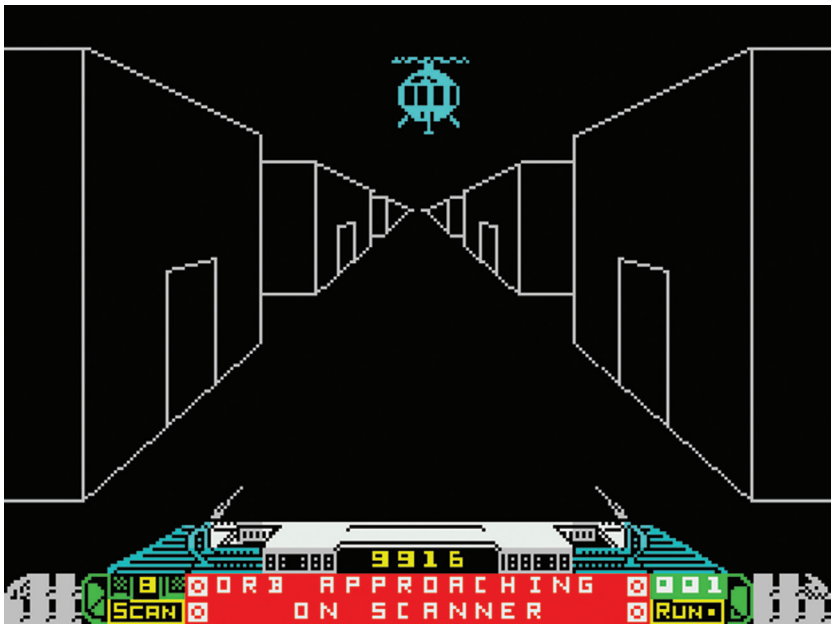
At the age of 19, I managed to get a residency in London seven nights a week playing bass/vocals and computers were an unknown entity in my world. But things changed dramatically when aged 27 I met Victoria, my wife, and as I worked every night I was restless most days and to stop me incessantly tapping rhythms on the table, knees or anything available, she suggested I get a hobby outside of music.

Thrust, published by Firebird Software in 1986.

I recall seeing an advert for the ZX81 and what really drew me in was the image of a BASIC listing that had the line:

10 LET Eggs = 12

This line fascinated me, how could Eggs be equal to 12, what did it mean? When I got one home I was hooked. I played around with BASIC for a while but soon moved onto POKEing the relevant code numbers into memory and running the resulting machine code. I remember spending several days trying but failing to move a black square across the screen using machine code, when I finally realised that it had moved so fast, I just didn't see it. "Blew my mind into another hairdo!"



Buggy Blast, published by Firebird Software in 1985.

When the Spectrum came out I bought one straight away and suggested to my brother-in-law, Paul Hibbard, that we could make money writing games. He agreed and we soon had a viable game idea which we called *Buggy Blast*. We spent many months getting the coding up to a level where we could show it to software publishers. Luckily, on pitching it we had immediate offers from Rainbird and Melbourne House with identical sizable advances. We were deliberating which offer to take when Rainbird rang back within ten minutes of their original offer and doubled their advance. No contest! This enabled us both to work full time on finishing the game, a very welcome respite for me as I was playing London clubs from 7pm to 2am every night.

I remember spending hours poring over *The Spectrum Rom Disassembly* to understand line drawing, and how to handle floating point maths in machine code. We would add up the T-states of different instructions to work out the fastest way to move the dummy screen to the video area. The trick of relocating the Z80 stack pointer and popping the lot off, as opposed to an LDIR instruction or loop, was just one of the neat tricks we happened upon that made some of the game requirements possible. It was the fact that the coding was such a challenge that made the whole thing such a joy.

After *Buggy Blast* I felt the need to get back to playing and recording music. Paul carried on with Firebird and produced the remarkable *Rasputin* on the Spectrum 128K. He asked me to do the music for the game, a move which unknowingly was

to influence the next ten years of my life. When the *Rasputin* music was finished Rainbird rang and asked me if I would do the Z80 conversion of *Thrust*. I said yes, borrowed a C64 and played the game with growing trepidation. I knew it had been written by somebody with maths knowledge greater than mine and initially I had no idea how it was done. They gave me a month to finish it and I remember spending the first week with a cork stuck on the end of a knitting needle (!) trying to understand how the physics of the ship was affected by the weight of the pod swinging under it.

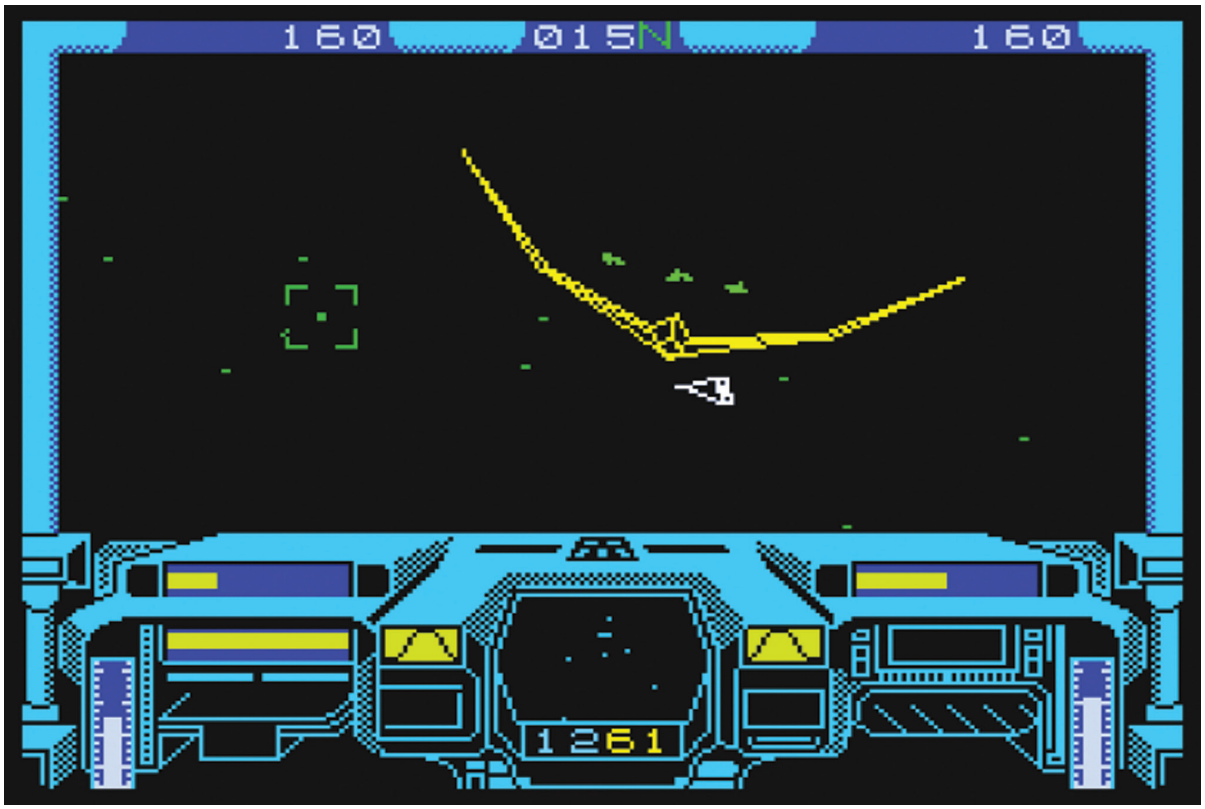
Starglider, published by Rainbird Software in 1986.

I managed to get it in on time, just! They then asked if I would do the Amstrad version but as I was on the point of moving house, so I declined. They then asked to buy my source code and being a broke musician I agreed. Whether it was used for the Amstrad version I never found out.

Now with a son and two young daughters we moved up north to Scarborough.

For the next ten years I continued to write driver code and music for many software houses, on most of the available computer formats and consoles. Although the diversity and challenges through this period were many and varied the days learning how to make the Spectrum, with its rubber keys and Microdrives, perform its own miracles still hold a special place.

My remaining +3 with all its accompanying peripherals, now lives in a box in the studio loft but I swear I sometimes hear it calling my name.



sinclair special

4

Inside...
Two special offers...
Six new software titles...
Microdrive!

John May

John has a great many Spectrum titles under his belt – the most well known being *Karnov*, *Koronis Rift* and *The Real Ghostbusters* that brought him great critical acclaim and 'Crash Smashes'.

Like many Spectrum enthusiasts I first started my Spectrum love affair with the ZX81 and tinkering with some programming after school – typing in games on the terrible keyboard and losing it all when the wobbly RAM pack reset the machine.

When the Spectrum came out I used to rush my paper round so I could spend some time reading a C&VG magazine that was in my bag – God bless the customer who had this delivered and never complained of it arriving looking slightly used.

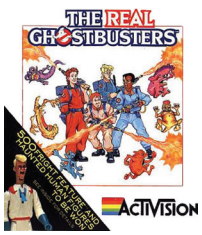
When I got my first Spectrum I was amazed with *Atic Atac* and too many other games to mention.

I was hooked and wanted to write games on the Spectrum. I had started an ITec YTS computer course and was learning Z80 and 6502. After finishing the course I signed up for A-Level Computer Studies at college but was only a few weeks in when I went for an interview as a junior Z80 programmer at Mr Micro in Swinton, Manchester and was rather chuffed when I was given a job.

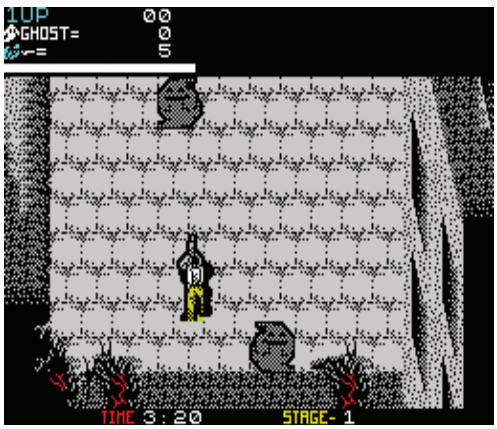
Mr Micro was probably very typical of the small software houses at the time – it was a great place to work with a very homely feel to it; Jim and Val the owners looked after us. It was a good little software house and I spent many years working there even though the wait for paycheques at the end of the month was at times challenging but probably somehwat the norm for the industry back then.

The big project they were working on at the time was *Spitfire 40* – I converted the code to run on the Spectrum Microdrive. I don't think the publisher ever went forward with this version but it was good practice for me on the Spectrum.

Around this time sadly the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded, and we had



The Real Ghostbusters, published by Activision in 1990.



a producer from Activision visiting in the studio telling us that with a fresh wave of publicity they wanted to do an Amstrad conversion of their Space Shuttle simulator. A very sad way to get your first real project – but what can you do?

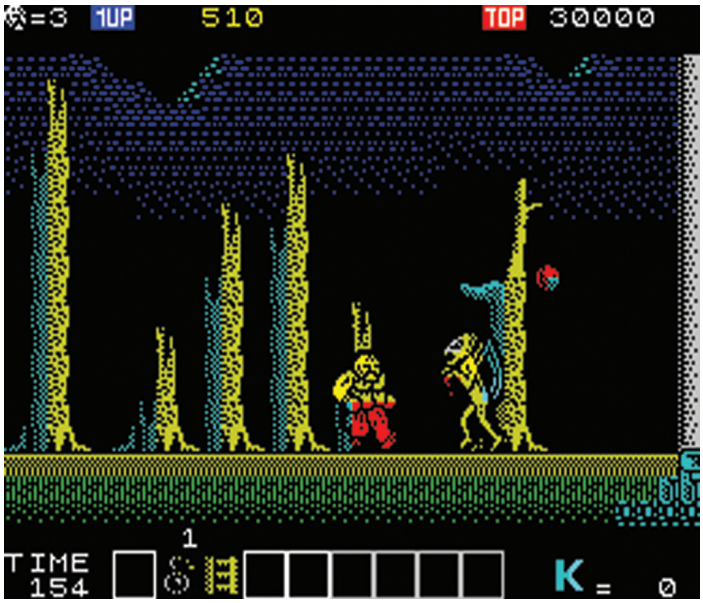
This proved quite a tough project – it was my first and the source code given was only a hard printed copy that had horrible local labels but we managed to complete it.

When I had arrived at Mr Micro the Spectrum development process was horrible with Z80 Assembler under CPM on the Amstrad CPC 6128 squirted down to the Spectrum which was very, very slow.

When we upgraded to using an Amstrad 8512 the development process was beautiful and fast - these machines were a godsend to Spectrum games development.

A further boost to our Z80 development was our Lead Programmer, Rob Nicholson who hands down was the best programmer I ever met. He developed a very clever set of assembler macros that were quite simply unbelievable and allowed for fast and easy writing of structured code which was very simple to read.

I have always been an RPG fan and a big fan of fantasy novels; I had played all the Gold Box Dungeons and Dragons games and read all the books in the Dragonlance: The Dragons of Autumn Twilight series, so I was jealous when our C64 programmer was working on *Heroes of the Lance* for US Gold. However we then got to do the sequel *Dragons of Flame* on the Spectrum and Amstrad so I was pleased as punch to finally get my name on a Dungeons and Dragons game, even if it wasn't a proper RPG game as such.

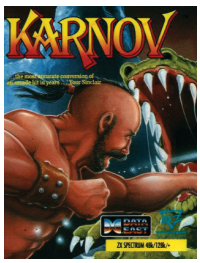


The games I was most pleased to have worked on were *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Karnov* and *Koronis Rift*. Getting a Crash Smash was a delight and we had the arcade machines of *Ghostbusters* and *Karnov* in the office so I got to play both games to death and plot and code all the baddies. *Koronis Rift* was a great favourite of mine on the Atari 800XL. I got to play it plenty before working on the Spectrum Psytek section of the game.

After Mr Micro I worked at quite a few different games companies; I grew more and more fed up of moving around the country for another project at a different studio.

Whilst I'm pleased to no longer be in the industry I will always look back on my Spectrum days and Mr Micro as my favourite.

Karnov, published by Electric Dreams Software in 1988.



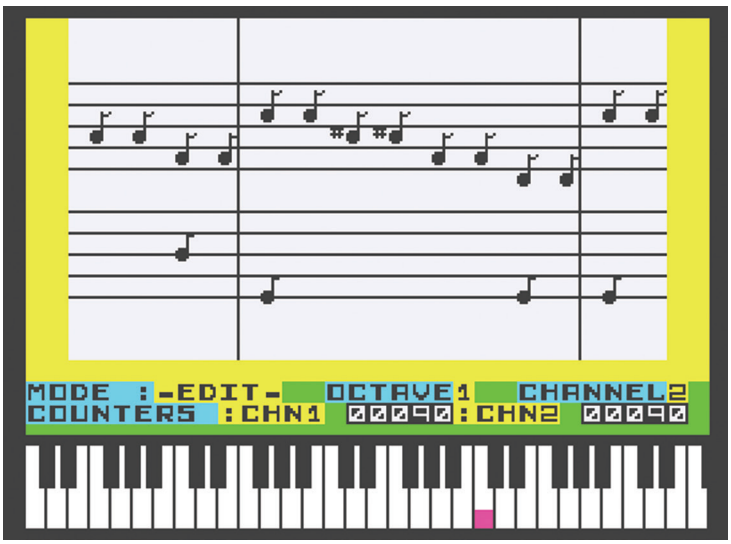
Alberto González

After tinkering with programming games for the ZX Spectrum, Alberto soon discovered that making music on the Sinclair machine was much more fun and produced musical scores for many well known games.

I remember the first time I was interested in how videogames worked. It was at the age of 10. I was playing with one of the first consoles with my cousins, probably an Atari 2600, and I wondered how these figures could move and make sound on the TV as if they were alive. I asked my uncle how could it be and he did his best to explain that there was a program inside the machine which made electricity pass very fast throughout different paths all over the circuits, and that it was this that produced the images and the sounds on the TV. It was so fascinating! And it is still so to me now.

Some time later my father bought me my first computer, a small Casio PB–700 expanded to 8k of RAM. It was far from having the capabilities of a ZX Spectrum, but it introduced me to BASIC programming. I started to draw my first graphics on it – the first sprite I drew was the main character of Exolon, which I copied from a ZX Spectrum magazine named Microhobby. Soon I had programmed my first simple games. It was so amazing to create new things out of nothing.

Then came the day when I managed to exchange my PB–700 and some money for a grey ZX Spectrum +2. At last a new world of wonders was opened to me, not only because I could finally play the games I saw in the magazines, but also because of all the things I would be able to do with the new machine. At that time I used



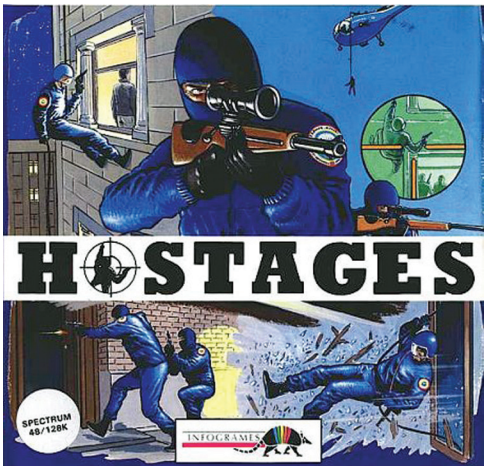
Wham! The Music Box, published by Melbourne House in 1985.

to draw a lot on paper, I could now use the Spectrum instead – lots and lots of graphics and sprites and animations. Trying to overcome the limitations of the screen attributes was challenging but also very rewarding. I also remember recording the tunes from my favourite game composers to tape to listen to them in my Walkman. Nobody understood me at that time!

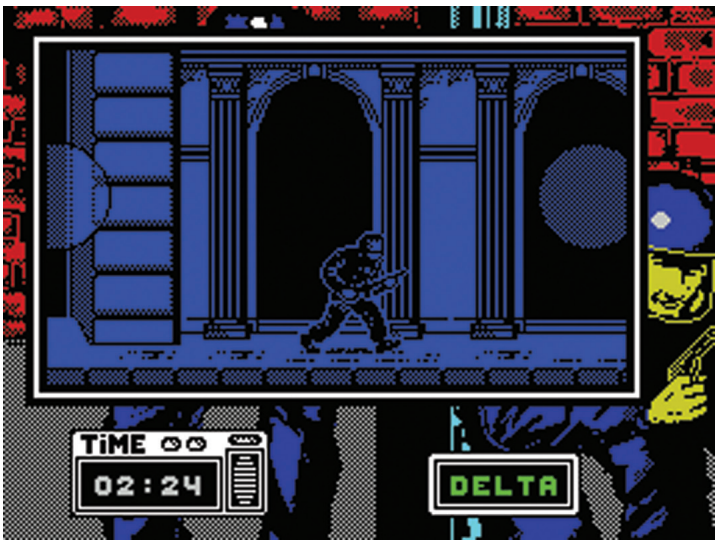
Thanks to the graphics I created I could start working as a graphic artist in New Frontier, a small company in Barcelona which at the time had only released one game called *Time Out*. It was 1988 and I was 16.

Then something happened that would change my life forever; I came across a program named *Wham! The Music Box* and I started making music with it, trying to emulate my favourite game composers and the music I heard at the time. I hadn't composed any music before, so that would make the +2 my first musical instrument. My friends thought the music was good and that would mark the start of my career as a game musician and programmer.

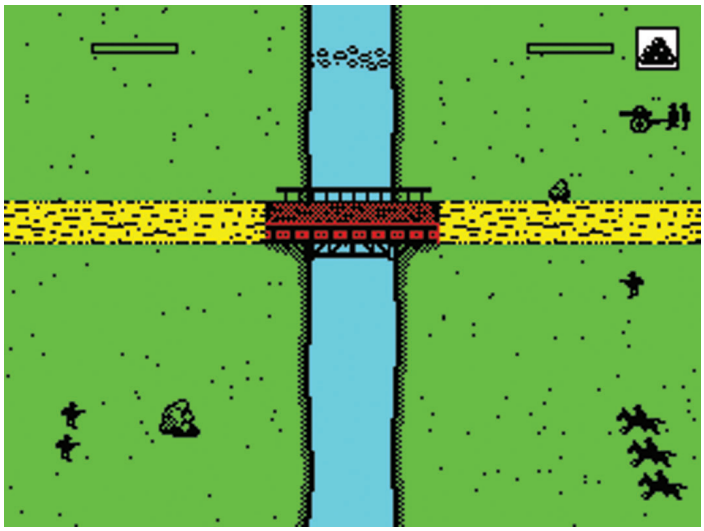
After doing the graphics for some unpublished games and the music for some well known ZX Spectrum 48K to MSX ports (*Power Drift*, *Snoopy*, *Ghostbusters II* and *Altered Beast*) I managed to get a contract to work for Infogrames producing 8-bit ports of its 16-bit games. Finally came the day when the first complete game with my graphics and music would see the light of day. It was *Hostages*, released in 1990. We managed to collect enough money together to buy a bottle of bubbly to celebrate our first review, 90% in Crash Magazine. Not bad for a first game!



At first, coding the music was a very laborious task for me. I mostly composed by trial and error, poking notes into the sound driver, compiling and listening to the result until I got the melody I really wanted. When I got enough experience coding in ASM I programmed my own music editor on the Spectrum, the 'Compact Editor'. It



Hostages, published by Infogrames in 1990.



North & South, published by Infogrames in 1991.

was basically a tracker like the ones I saw on the Amiga 500. That little piece of code would serve me well for a long time.

After *Hostages* came *Magic Johnson's Basketball* which I'd rather forget, followed by *North & South*. The sprites were a real challenge on that one. I had all of them already drawn in monochrome, but my colleagues convinced me to redraw them in full colour. It was the right decision since the game had great reviews with 96% in Crash Magazine.

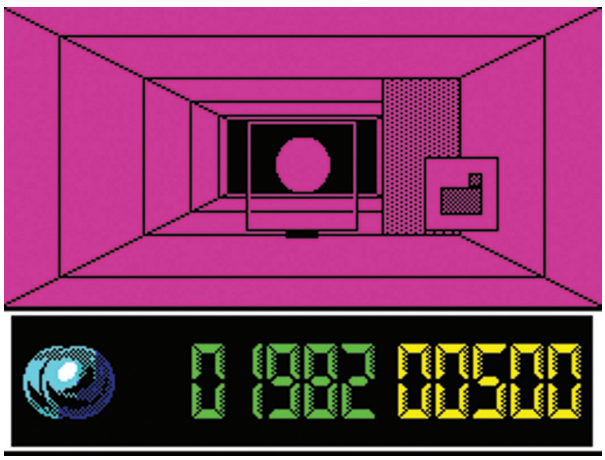
Then came *Light Corridor*, for which I composed one of the longest soundtracks for the ZX Spectrum and *Mystical* which was my last work before leaving for the obligatory military service at the age of 18. I managed to bring my beloved +2 with me to the army quarters and during the whole year I composed a lot of music including the soundtrack for an unpublished game called *Sokoban*.

When I came back from military service in 1992 the ZX Spectrum era had ended, but we continued working for Infogrames doing mostly games for 8-bit consoles.

That didn't mean I stopped using my beloved +2 – on the contrary. I was so used to the way I composed and coded the music using the +2 and my Compact Editor that I continued doing so until the year 2003. That's right, almost every one of my soundtracks for Game Boy, NES, Game Gear and Master System was primarily composed on a ZX Spectrum +2 attached to an Amstrad CPC color monitor, and then converted to assembler and tweaked in a compiler just like I did in the old days.

Pretty crazy when I think of it. At a later time I continued using the editor but on a custom ZX Spectrum emulator running at 60hz which was more appropriate for the consoles.

Since the +2 no other machine has served me so well. It was a source of amusement, challenge and knowledge. I miss my old +2!



Light Corridor, published by Infogrames in 1991.

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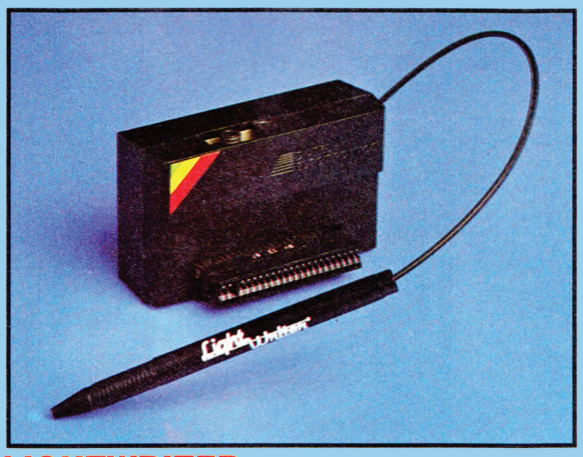

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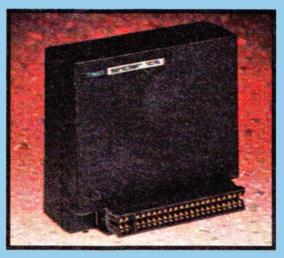

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Ross Harris

Ross started off his gaming career by producing text based adventure games on the Spectrum and often came back to this type of game between shooters and fighting games.

I was indifferent to the release of Sinclair ZX Spectrum in the spring of 1982. Just another clever bit of electronics that didn't actually do anything useful, whatever the nice people on TV would say;

"In a few years we will send mail electronically, check our bank balances and even book airline tickets all on a personal computer".

The very idea still makes me smile. Crazy talk.

But I wasn't unaware of the Sinclair name. Living about 25 miles from Dundee, the Timex factory there was already churning out ZX81s, one of which was owned by my physics teacher. My goal that summer of getting into St Andrews University was to be accomplished in part thanks to my 5 year old Sinclair Scientific LED pocket calculator.

But the ZX Spectrum was only pictures in magazines. Mail order only, it didn't hit the high street until almost a year later. During that time I'd been considering getting a ZX81 but luckily I'd been dragging my feet a bit. When the first playable Spectrum displays appeared in John Menzies in April 1983, I was sold.

P-47 Thunderbolt, published by Firebird Software in 1990.

At the time, there weren't many games about that grabbed my attention. So I got to grips learning how to program in basic and typed in many a magazine listing. This was, after all, a device that could do things. Even if what it did didn't seem to be anything more than fun.

And then the game industry took off. The first games I recall enjoying

playing were *Bugaboo* and *Chequered Flag*. A fun machine to play with and play on. But it was *Ant Attack* that opened up my eyes. Here was something I had never even imagined before, 3D interactive virtual worlds when all before had been in 2D.

But to do something like that took skill and talent, and machine code. And so I dove into learning the ins and outs of the Z80 with the goal of creating arcade games of my own. But a small company in Wales was to lead me in another direction.

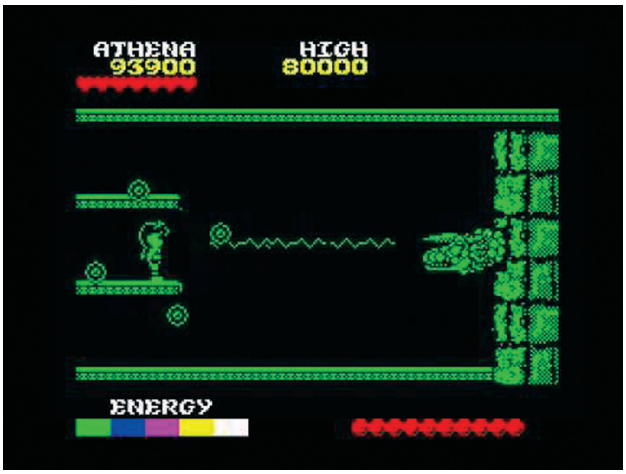
"100% machine code", said the small classified ad (they would upgrade to half and full page adverts much later). It sounded too good to be true, even for a whopping 15 quid. I don't know why I risked it, there were no reviews until November of 1983, but I sent off a cheque and held my breath.

Amazingly it was true, *The Quill* by Gilsoft was all anyone would want to create fast and polished text adventures. Adventures you could sell without any royalties or other restrictions. What a great concept.

Samurai Warrior, published by Firebird Software in 1988.

I quickly dashed off my first adventure, an uneven mess of in jokes based on the people I knew and the village I lived in – *The Dunshalt Donut*. A misspelled small classified advert in Home Computer Weekly announced its availability in March of 1984, with the great Tony Bridges reviewing it quite sympathetically about 6 months later in Popular Computer Weekly.

Bitten with the bug, I hit *The Quill* again to recreate as accurately as possible an ancient (10 year old) public domain game, *Colossal Cave Adventure*. Freed up from actually designing an original game, I hacked the Quill interpreter to pause text from scrolling offscreen and (inspired by Infocom) to put a display bar visible at all times with the current



Psycho Soldier, published by Imagine Software in 1987.

location, score and moves taken. Sadly, the file that ended up on World Of Spectrum was the vanilla unmodified Quill version.

But graphics were always a draw for me, even working on text adventures and so for my third game, the weird fiction inspired *Cursed be the City*, I made the switch to *Graphic Adventure Creator*. While it offered text compression, the actual editor ate up about 18K (compared to the Quill's 5K) of useable ram so the text was somewhat kept short to begin with, and trimmed even more when I added in the location art. As a compromise, I made a text only version for one side of the cassette tape, ripped out the graphics and expanded the text. This text only version is the one that is on the WOS website.

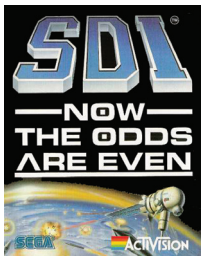
I don't remember how in this pre-internet age, but I somehow got in touch with Mike White of 8th Day software, a far more successful bedroom developer of text adventures using *The Quill*. He had a game, *Ronnie goes to Hollywood*, that needed location art and I agreed to do it partly to have an excuse to use Gilsoft's *The Illustrator*.

This collaboration led to a gig down in Brighton in the summer of 1987 to create location art for another adventure, *Rigel's Revenge* by Smart Egg Software. My first (proper) paid gig and commercial release, which ironically marked the end of my 5 year romance with the ZX Spectrum. Because I blew the money I earned on a train ticket back to Scotland (I'd taken the bus down) and a brand new Atari ST computer.

I was hired in October 1987 at Source the Software House, in Otley, West Yorkshire to work on Spectrum, C64 and CPC games (and later on ST, Amiga, PC, NES and Game Boy).

Every single Spectrum (and other) game I did art for was done on the Atari ST with its proper keyboard and mouse and a great bit of software called Art Studio. And while the Spectrum was my favourite machine of the big 3 to work on, I don't think I ever took the time to load a Spectrum game for fun outside of work.

Even today, to ask which of the 4 most popular computers of the time was 'the best' will elicit very passionate debate. Which is rather odd when you think about it objectively. On paper, the BBC micro, the C64 and the Amstrad CPC win hands down over the



S.D.I. published by Activision in 1988.

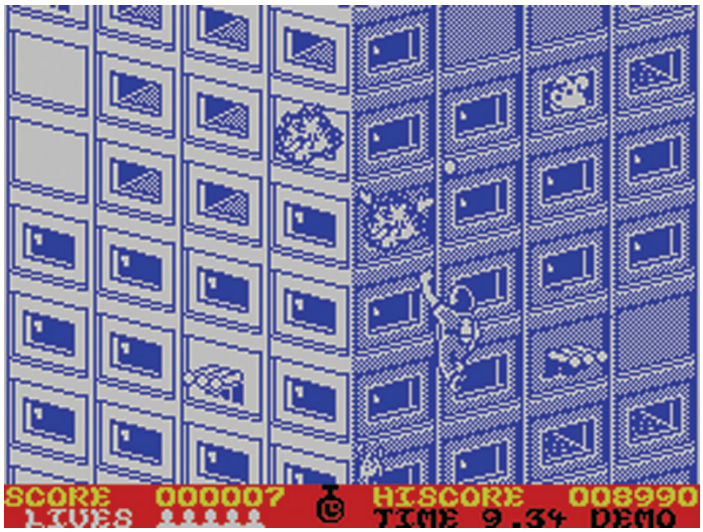
ZX Spectrum in every category (except free RAM available to the user).

So why was it so successful? From many accounts, even Sir Clive wasn't that interested in the actual development of the ZX82. But he had the vision of what the new machine should be.

It wasn't ever meant to be the best machine currently available at the time, nor was it going to blow anyone away with its sound and graphics capabilities. The keyboard was never going to attract anyone who wanted to type, and the cassette tape storage was a low cost and somewhat old tech solution to storage even back in 1982.

No, what the ZX Spectrum was designed primarily to be was affordable to 'the man in the street', and this is why it ultimately succeeded.

To use a music analogy, the BBC computer was classical music (impressive but conservative and dull), the C64 was pop music (flashy, loud and shallow) and the Amstrad CPC was like a school recital (all the instruments but no real passion or enthusiasm).



And the Spectrum? Well it was punk! It was cool. It was working class. The hardware gave you nothing. If you wanted to make something move onscreen then you had to do it yourself.

You couldn't distract players with fast scrolling or 3 channel sound. There was no obvious path to take, so people made their own paths.

I'm not claiming that every game on the Spectrum was a gem, far from it. But when an idea hit pay dirt, it hit big.

So the real question is not what the best machine was, but what machine had the best software. And for me, the ZX Spectrum wins hands down.

The little computer that could.

Firetrap, published by Electric Dreams Software in 1987.

Shaun Mcclure

Shaun learnt his early skills using *Melbourne Draw*, creating some memorable loading screens that were celebrated in the magazines of the time.

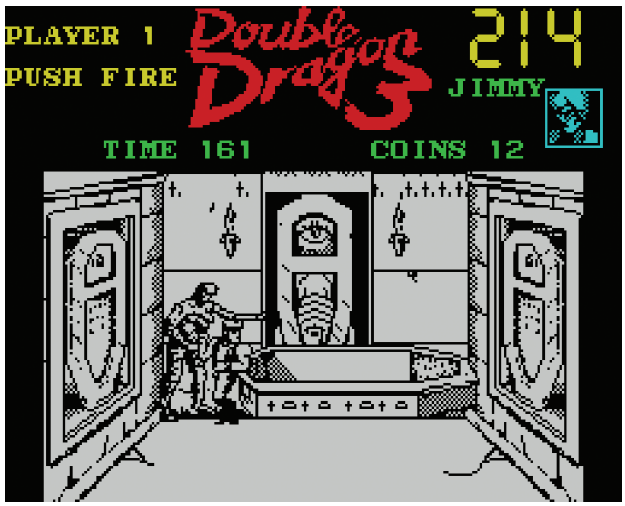
Well I guess I started off just like everyone else – a little kid with a computer in a bedroom. I remember being an avid gamer, starting off first on the ZX81 and then upgrading like everyone else to the ZX Spectrum when it hit the market.

I didn't have a lot of money to buy software so when I saw a mail order advert for 'buy five games for 25p each' (you know the one where you then have to buy a game at full price thereafter every month for a year), I couldn't resist and one of those titles ordered was *Melbourne Draw*. I copied the tapes received and returned them all as 'damaged', cancelling my membership in the process. Not the most honest thing to do, but it did get me the software I needed to get started.

Melbourne Draw, published by Melbourne House in 1983.

Being a keen artist on paper, and being about 14, I spent most of my time drawing sword fighting men or skulls on top of piles of treasure. Using *Melbourne Draw*, I could now create my art on a computer – they were black and white at first, as I needed time to get my head around the dreaded attribute clash that plagued the Spectrum.

The attribute problem on the Spectrum was well known and initially to overcome the 'clash' I started to draw my designs onto graph paper first, work out the colours on there and then replicate the design onto *Melbourne Draw*. Once I got a little more practice I eventually dropped the graph paper and used *Melbourne Draw* directly – drawing a sketch on acetate first, sellotaping it onto a TV screen and then moving the cursor underneath to draw the



Double Dragon 3, the last game worked on by Shaun.

basic outline with the keyboard. *Melbourne Draw's* really useful 'grid' mode removes the colour and shows the character squares in a chess board effect – without this great feature, getting the attributes lined up properly would be nigh on impossible.

After producing a portfolio of examples, I sent some off on demo tapes to lots of small indie adventure companies, and some rather larger well-known ones too. The rejection letters started to flood in from the larger companies. With the smaller indies, they were more than happy to utilise my new found skills but were not able to pay me for my time. I was happy to work for free in those early days as the experience I gained was invaluable and my name was being mentioned in reviews in all the top magazines of the time. This garnered attention from some of the bigger players – companies like Zenobi Software, Tartan, 8th Day Software, and so on.

I produced some really good work for *Fuddo and Slam* for Zenobi in the form of a 'flick book' of really colourful illustrations. This is when I'd finally 'cracked' getting the best out of static Spectrum screens, and I think the work I did back then still stands up to some of the best that has been seen on the Spectrum.

The loading screen for *The Weaver of Her Dreams*.

The loading screen I drew for *The Weaver of Her Dreams* got a lot of attention. The graphic was black and white, very detailed, and very enigmatic – so much so it was featured and talked about in a number of magazines.

Slowly my name was getting known. I then worked on a full game with a friend called Ian Smith and his dad Tom called *Excalibur: Sword of Kings* and it was published by Alternative Software. Two more games followed that were made using the same engine and were eventually published by Zenobi Software. These games were graphic adventures that, unlike most other adventures of the time, were written in machine

Screen from *Saint Dragon*.

NARC, published by Ocean Software in 1990.

code. The game art was all bitmap so again I could show off my attribute skills to good effect.

By this time I was getting lots of loading screen work from D & H Games who themselves published many sports management games – I was earning decent money for a kid of 18 at £25 a screen.

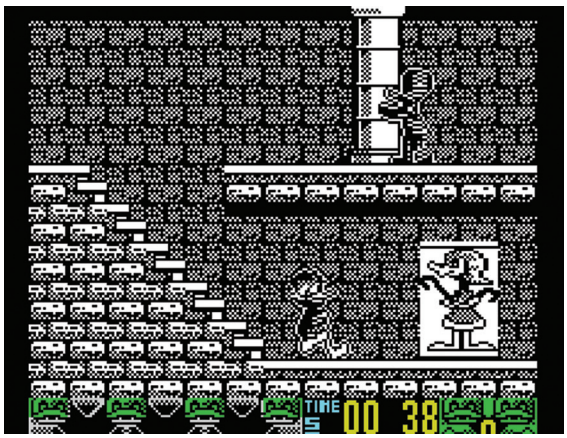
Working on adventure games and producing loading screens was all well and good, but I needed to work on bigger titles. I got hired by a local developer called 'Wise Owl Software' and it was here I began learning how to animate graphics and learn new skills such as map design, map block drawing using repeatable tiles and so on. Again the money was not good at around £75 a week gross – but in conjunction with the freelance cash I was earning, I was quite well off compared to my mates that at the time were still in 6th form or on the dole. This was also the first time I'd worked on non-budget titles. Whilst at Wise Owl I also worked on a few titles for Ocean Software converting Spectrum classics such as *Top Gun*, *Renegade*, *Slap Fight* etc to the Thompson – a computer that was pretty big in France at the time.

I moved on to another dev team called 'Enigma Variations' in Harrogate. This company specialised in churning out budget games in record time with each title taking a month or so to produce for all the main formats. I worked on a number of games for Enigma for both the Spectrum and the Amstrad – *Count Duckula*, *Sooty and Sweep*, *Real Stunt Experts* to name but three.

I was hankering at the time for bigger titles to work on, and therefore headed to London attracted by the big lights. I managed to get some freelance work to begin with at a company called Vivid Image that had a lot of ties with System 3 and Probe etc. There I worked on an arcade adventure game called *Time Machine* and met Raffaele Cecco (*Exolon*) and Nick Jones (*Pyjamarama*) who were also working on other versions of the same game. I felt I had hit the big time at last!

Once that game was done, I worked at Sales Curve and became their specialist Spectrum guy working on *Narc* (Ocean), *Rodland*, *Saint Dragon* and *Double Dragon 3*. *Double Dragon 3* was the last Spectrum game I worked on – with sales of Spectrum games in decline the company decided to concentrate on other platforms like the Game Boy and Mega Drive.

I have worked on many platforms since my time at Sales Curve, but I can honestly say that it was the Spectrum games that I will remember with the most fondness.



Count Duckula, published by Alternative Software in 1989.

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YS/2

Ian Smith

The ZX Spectrum was home to some cracking adventures and Ian Smith, with some help from his friend Shaun Mcclure, produced a number of the more memorable ones.

When the Sinclair ZX81 entered my life with a silent fanfare, I knew it had unlocked the door to another dimension, albeit a monochrome dimension of sight, but no sound. I soon found however, that the key to this door was not included in the package. No, it transpired that I had to build my own key, slowly, and often painstakingly.

It all began with the classic code:

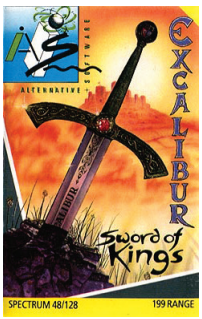
10 PRINT "Ian"

20 GOTO 10

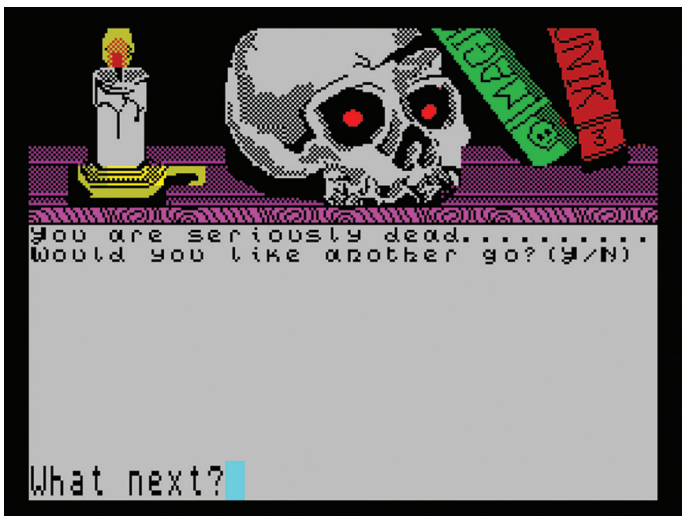
Having created an on screen column of eponymousness, I soon learned that if I simply added a semi colon to the end of line 10, I could completely fill the screen with my one name – amazing!

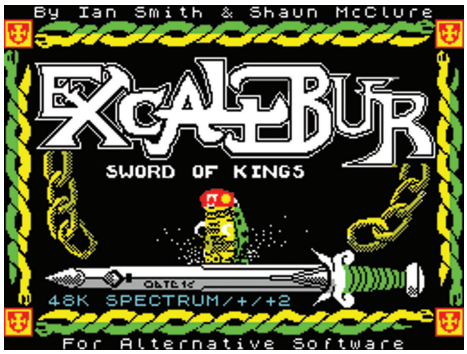
Magazines of the likes of Sinclair Programs and Sinclair User gave me the chance to explore the full capabilities of this 16K home computer (yes my parents were good to me, I had the RAM pack). But I had to wait one whole year until my next birthday to experience colour and sound with the unwrapping of the awe-inspiring ZX Spectrum.

The aforementioned magazines (and many more by that time) were still going strong, and I began to learn the art of debugging code. And backup strategies. Believe me, when you've spent all of Sunday afternoon typing hundreds of lines of a BASIC program, fully expecting to see angry alien saucers whizzing across your TV screen, only to see your Speccy reboot itself immediately after you press the RUN



Excalibur: Sword of Kings, published by Alternative Software in 1987.



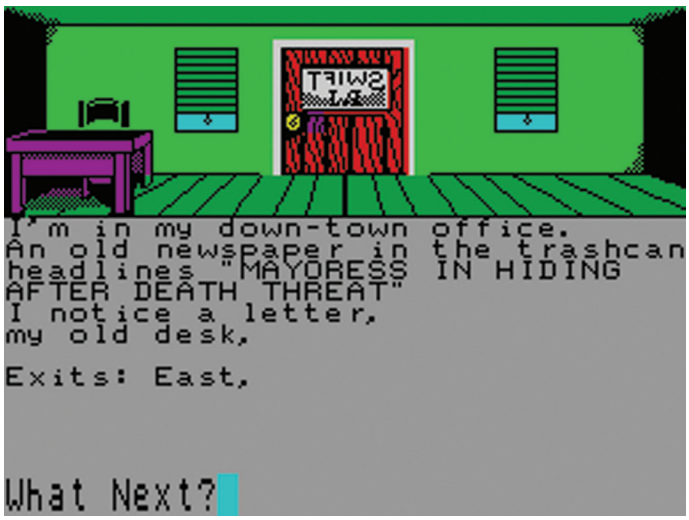


Excalibur: Sword of Kings loading screen.

key, you start to think maybe I should have saved it first?

Having eventually exceeded the snail like limitations of BASIC, I graduated to Assembly Language and Machine Code. This coincided with my developing a love of playing text and graphical adventures (think Scott Adams, Level 9 and Melbourne House). Choosing this genre as a starting point meant I could jump straight into coding a simple split screen text and graphics adventure without having to learn the complicated business of moving sprites around the screen. There was only one problem – I had no skills in the graphics department. That's where my good friend Shaun Mcclure came in. He had already shown a burgeoning talent for pixel art and it wasn't long before we had a working prototype up and running. We called it *Excalibur: Sword of Kings*. We wanted it to look slightly different to its contemporaries, so we doubled the font height on our parser line, and made it dual colour. Apart from that, it was a pretty run of the mill, small graphical adventure based on a medieval fantasy setting. After completing the project, we touted it around a couple of distributors (CDS Micro Systems for example) until we settled upon Alternative Software, who were happy to ship the game in its £1.99 budget range. We were ecstatic to see it displayed on the shelves of our local computer games store, and even more overjoyed when it started to get decent reviews in the press, such as an 8 out of 10 in Sinclair User magazine.

We went on to publish two more adventure titles together; *Alien Research Centre* and *Hit*. On these latter titles we collaborated with my late father, Tom Smith. Although neither an artist nor a coder, he had an amazing head for maths. We had developed what we thought were a couple of clever strategies to save precious memory when storing the games' location graphics. When the player was exploring a castle for instance, one room might



Hit, published by Zenobi Software in 1989.

look very similar to another, except with different furnishing. We chose to store just a single room template in memory, and then populate it with what we called transfers; a chair, a suit of armour or a wizened old crow (AKA a pensioner of evil magical disposition). Using this and other techniques we had been able to reduce the amount of memory dedicated to graphics storage by around 60%. However, my dad was able to compress our graphics memory even further using mathematical formulas I don't understand to this very day. And with which he reduced the storage area by 80%.

More memory space, meant more locations. It also facilitated our introducing another novelty element which was not commonly seen in adventure games of the period; that of sound effects. We had oodles of fun recording the death throes of a Giant Space Maggot and a Freeze Beast. Just don't ask us where we found these creatures, or how we got so close to them with a microphone.

My own footnote in the history of the ZX Spectrum begins and ends with our three adventure games. Shaun however, went on to a career in the world of computer game design, and has been credited on literally hundreds of games since those early days. I went on to a career in IT, from designing, implementing and supporting networks, through to computer repair and maintenance. But even today, I feel that those long weekends of the early 80s, typing in code from magazines, stood me in good stead. Now when I see the Blue Screen of Death on a PC I'm working on, I think "Hah! You've seen nothing unless you've seen the ZX Spectrum Flashing Blocks of Death Screen!"

A.R.C. (Alien Research Centre) published by Zenobi Software in 1989 – loading screen above and main game screen to the right.

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Jas Austin

Jas produced many classic games for Automata and Martech including 2000AD licences *Nemesis the Warlock* and *Slaine the Babarian*.

My ZX Spectrum story begins early one morning in 1982, outside my local WH Smiths, excitedly waiting for it to open. I had arrived early thinking I would be one of many wanting to pick up Sinclair's new super computer. Turned out I was the only one. But this in no way dampened my enthusiasm.

Having previously owned a ZX81, I couldn't wait to get my hands on this new technology which appeared to be a huge step forward. With its hi-res colour graphics, improved keyboard and larger inbuilt memory, it seemed like the future of computing would be in our homes.

Nemesis The Warlock published by Martech Games in 1987.

I've always been a huge fan of games – board, role playing and later video games. Spending my youth in the seaside city of Portsmouth, and in the 70s and 80s, Portsmouth's pier and surrounding area were awash with busy arcades. With their vibrant lights and sounds, I was drawn to them like a moth to a flame.

Most of my misspent youth I could be found in them, pumping ten pence pieces into games like *Pacman*, *Galaxians, Frogger* and *Gorf*. The thought of being able to play games like this at home on my ZX Spectrum seemed like a dream come true. Although the reality was somewhat different.

While the humble Spectrum was not up to the graphical and sound quality of the arcade games around at the time, it more than made up for this with a huge amount of original and innovative games.

I spent many hours enjoying the likes of *Manic Miner*, *Jetpac*, *Ant Attack* and *Head over Heels* to mention

just a few. As most games didn't include a save feature, I remember leaving my Spectrum switched on for days on end, so I would not lose my progress while trying to complete them.

Playing games was fun, but what really caught my interest was the thought of being able to create games myself. I had already done a bit of coding on my ZX81, and my school's PET and VIC-20. But having my own Spectrum enabled me to really get stuck in. I adored that it felt like the underdog. With its lack of hardware support, programming was a challenge, but satisfying. We had to utilise some rather unique techniques to coax out its potential.

My game development journey began in 1983, with a local games company called Automata. They made the seminal *Pi-Mania* and the 'ahead of its time' *Deus ex Machina*. I had previously visited their office to buy some of their crazy ZX81 games and kept in contact with Mel and Christian through a computer club. During Easter of 1983 at the club, Mel and Christian held a competition to make an Easter themed program. There ended up being only two entries, and mine was one of them. I wrote a very simple maze game called *Bunny*. It was all in BASIC and was actually pretty terrible. But lucky for me Automata offered to publish it, so of course I jumped at the chance. I was paid a massive one off fee of £25. I thought I'd hit the big time.

I went on to write a few more games for Automata, and then other companies like Martech and Activision. One particular personal high point was whilst working with Martech. I was a huge fan of the comic 2000AD, and they managed to score licences for *Nemesis the Warlock* and later, *Sláine the Barbarian*. I got to design and code both games, and even got to speak to one of my comic book heroes, Pat Mills (The creator of Sláine) Thinking back, it's crazy that they gave us free reign on their beloved franchises... Something that would never happen in games today.

Sláine, published by Martech Games in 1987.

I still look back at the Spectrum era with huge fondness. Played some fantastic games, met many talented people, and made some great friends along the way. I think it's safe to say that the UK games industry would not be what it is today without Sir Clive's machine. And it's certainly responsible for me still making games all these years later.

The fact that over thirty years later, people are still playing and talking about Spectrum games, let alone my games, is quite something.

I'm honoured to have been part of it.

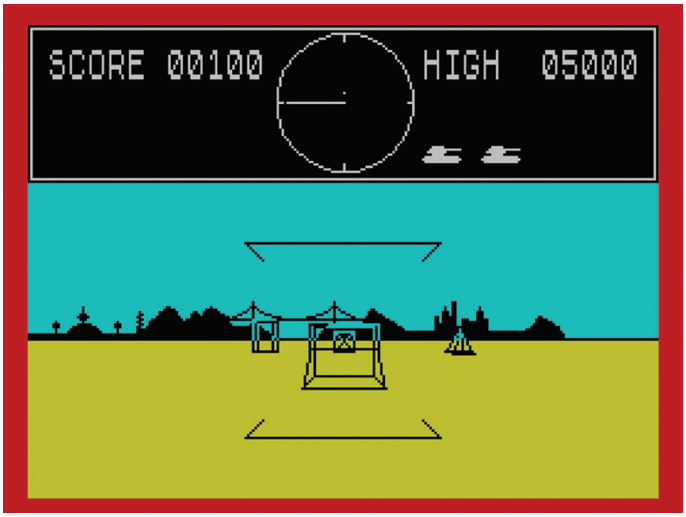
Ian Oliver

Realtime Software was headed up by Ian Oliver and garnered a massive reputation for producing cutting edge 3D games on the ZX Spectrum. Looking at the softography of the company, it's easy to see why.

The Sinclair Spectrum wasn't my first computer, but it was the one that transitioned me from being a hobbyist and student to someone at least trying to be a professional engineer and manager. In short, I guess you could say that it changed my life.

I'd been playing around with computers since 1979 when I used money from working in a hotel to buy an Ohio Scientifc Superboard II. This was 6502-based and had very primitive graphics, but I got to do some amazing things once I abandoned Microsoft BASIC and taught myself 6502 machine code. I then went to Leeds University to study Computer Science, and obviously did a lot of coding on the mainframes and minis there, but my heart was still with the smaller machines, and "hitting the metal" directly. I bought myself another computer – a Dragon 64 with 6809 processor and (woohoo!) colour graphics – but I don't think I ever engaged with it as much as I had with the Superboard.

And then, when Andy, Graeme and I were in our final year at University, along came the Spectrum. It arrived at exactly the right time, as we'd been doing a lot of coding on the Dragon and a ZX81, and there were mumblings of "Hey, we should sell this stuff!" but with no consensus regarding what product or on which computer. It was probably Andy Onions



3D Tank Duel, published by Realtime Software in 1984.

who argued hardest that, yes the 6809 was cool, but the Spectrum 48K was going to sell and sell, so this was the machine for us. I'd also got rather good on the *Battlezone* arcade machine, and we all thought that 3D graphics were extremely cool, so the decision regarding our first product kind of made itself and *3D Tank Duel* was born.

Of course, in those days there were no engines, frameworks, APIs, or guides, so you just got stuck in and worked it all out for yourself. We were also penniless students, so all we had to work with was a single Spectrum 48 and a tape recorder. On top of this, we were also just typing Z80 into REM statements and assembling bits of code into a big blob of binary, with all linking (if you can call it that) done in our heads or on paper. Development was therefore slow despite us working stupidly long hours, which never really changed for Realtime Games to be honest!

The original *3D Starstrike*, published by Realtime Software in 1984.

However, while there were technical 'barriers to entry' there was no need to sign huge legal agreements, or to buy expensive development hardware, or even to find a publisher who liked your ideas and was prepared to provide funding, marketing, etc. No, you could just buy a Spectrum, pound that "dead toad" keyboard for a few months, make some tapes, get some reviews, and start selling your product, which is exactly what we did. This made the Spectrum a great democratiser as anyone with enough smarts and tenacity could start coding in their bedroom.

Later machines definitely had more power and features, but the slow drift towards the studio model, coupled with some of the barriers described above when consoles

Starstrike II, published by Realtime Software in 1986.

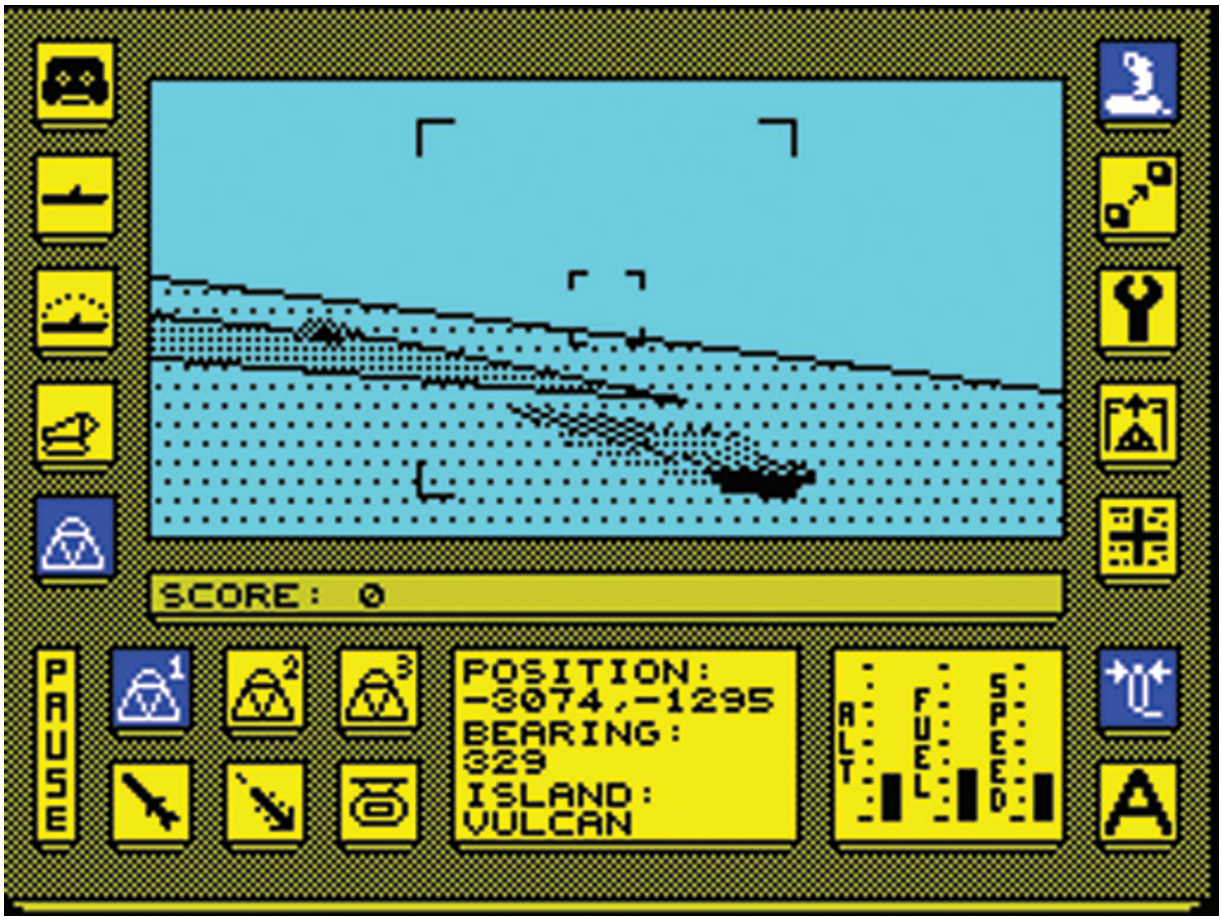
Starglider, above, published by Rainbird Software in 1986.

Carrier Command, below, published by Rainbird Software in 1989.

came along, meant that bedroom coders found it harder and harder to get started on their own. This really only changed with the ascendance of smartphone apps many decades later.

I think my memories of those early days are of the long hours, the feeling that we were having to figure out everything for ourselves as we were trying to do things that almost no-one else was attempting, but also of tremendous excitement and energy. Everyone involved with the Spectrum whether developing games, reviewing them, or buying and playing them, wanted to see what someone would manage next, what zany new ideas would come along, what Jeff Minter's next game would be called, and how much Ultimate could push the retail price for a cassette up to. Each issue of Crash magazine was read cover to cover, often multiple times, and we'd then buy a few games in the name of product research.

Perhaps this feeling never died away in the games industry, and it's just that I grew old and jaded, but I really do think the Spectrum was part of something new, and something that hasn't yet been repeated.



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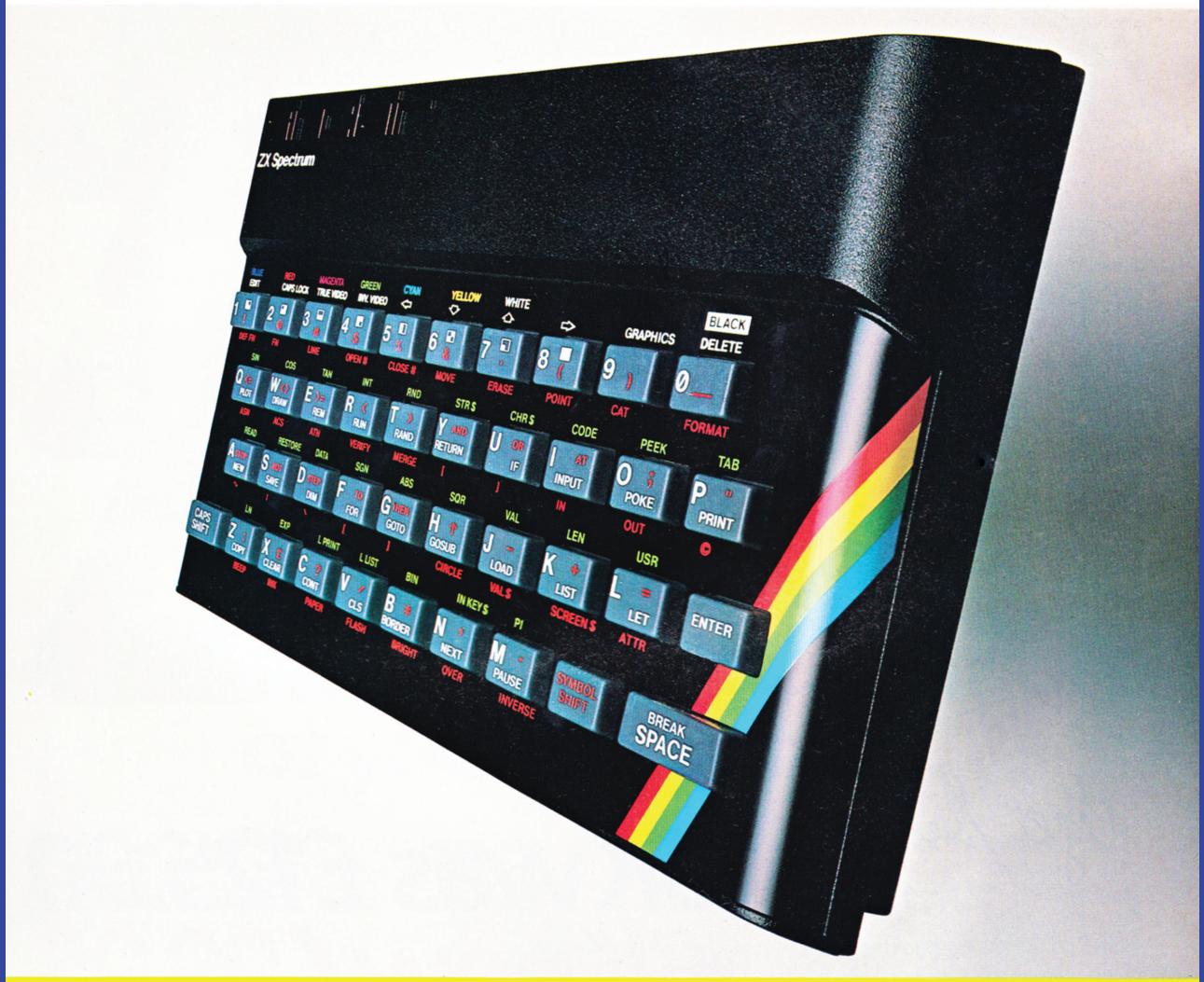

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Paul Hibbard

Paul partnered up wth David Lowe to make *Buggy Blast* but it will be *Rasputin* that he will be remembered for on the ZX Spectrum.

My journey into the computer games industry started when an Apple IIe desktop computer was introduced to my department at FMC. The mention of a computer was like someone saying "The Aliens have landed." To me it was "Wow! What can it do?"

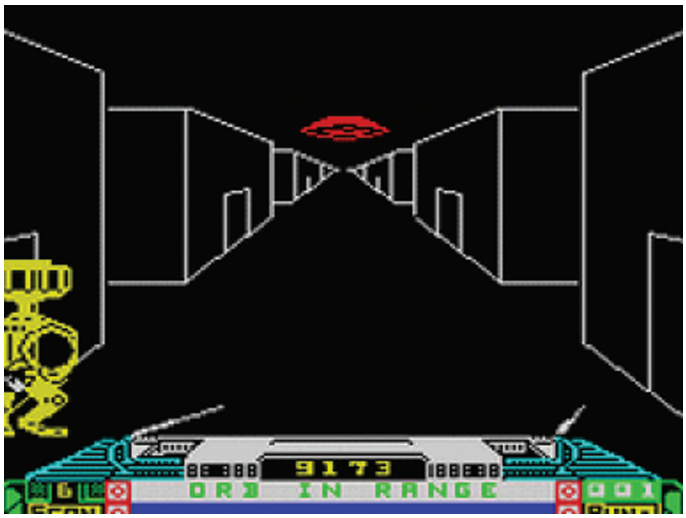
My next step into the desktop computer world was to teach myself BASIC. Strangely, due to one particular laborious task of my job, I decided the first step was to write a program to produce a calendar and deal with many of my job issues / questions. Simple it was not, but I did write a program that automated part of my job to an amazing degree.

I had told my brother-in-law Dave Lowe about my progress and he came up with a proposal from the Independent Record Labels to write a database for them for "£X pounds"? "Sure", I said, "no problem". Did I ever learn the lesson of how little I knew and what design creep was.

About this time Dave had been messing with this 'geek' thing called the Sinclair ZX81 and kept talking about the potential of these computers. I was intrigued but not sold. My mother had bought the kids an Atari game machine and I sat for hours and hours through the night playing games like *Pong* and then *Asteroids*.

Then the amazing Spectrum 48K appeared on the market and changed everything.

I bought a Spectrum and started playing the games; some good, some bad,



Buggy Blast, published by Firebird Software in 1985.

some very bad! I talked to Dave and said "I'm sure we could make better games". He agreed and as always we talked a lot about how to conquer the world.

I have no idea how the idea for *Buggy Blast* came about but I recall building the graphics of buildings and aliens. I wrote a BASIC program to produce the animation of driving down a street and was crestfallen that the speed was rubbish. Dave said it needs to be in machine code. I said "huh"? I had no idea what that was.

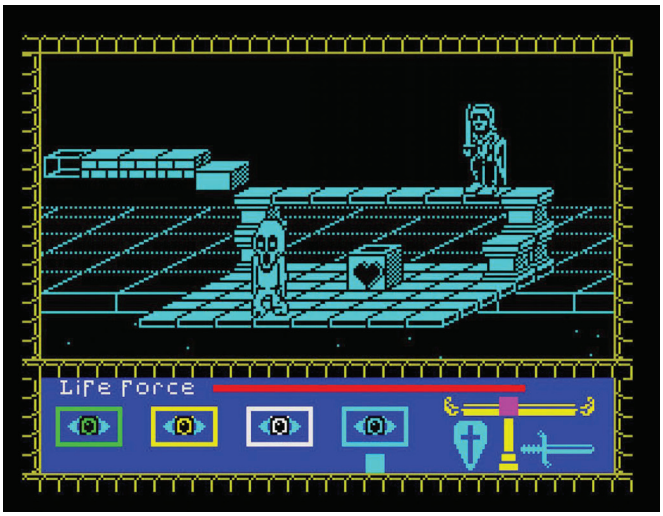
So I started learning machine code; it was really assembler but I didn't understand and I think we called it that long after we knew different because it sounded cool. I really struggled with the Z80 stuff at first and Dave was a great help but suddenly something clicked and blew my mind. The power seemed amazing. Dave and I started writing the game that became *Buggy Blast*.

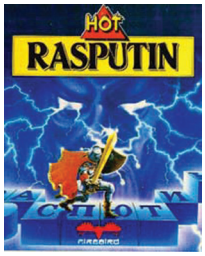
I interrupt the story to mention the 'power' of the Spectrum I am talking about; compared to today, mobile phones have more power and memory by a long way.

I can now look back and laugh about the equipment and tools we had to work with in the beginning. I started with a Spectrum, a cheap cassette tape recorder and a black and white portable TV (using the home TV for colour decisions). I can't remember how long the assembler took to load via cassette but it seemed like it took hours when my latest program crashed. Oh, and then I got a ZX thermal printer, what hell these were to list a program! I recall pinning the start of a listing high up on a wall so that the printer gradually crept down the wall and didn't jam. Later this was replaced by pinning failed Microdrive cartridges to the wall. I bet someone could write a Monty Python sketch where programmers compare these kind of stories.

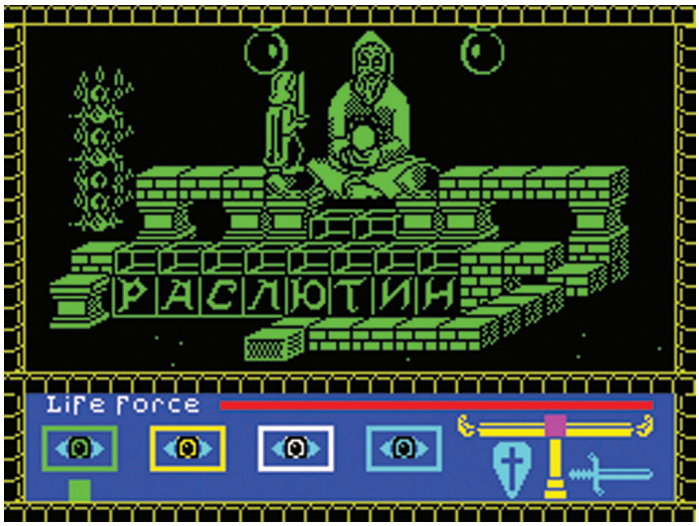
Dave and I knocked up a working demo and marketed it to most of the major companies of the day. Our clever marketing ploy secured interviews with most key people. "What was it?" I hear you ask. Another long story I say.

Past life experiences had taught us both to be very wary of business dealings so we were very cautious and this led us to the deal with Firebird because they were a subsidiary of BT. In order to get the deal we were interviewed by the legendary Dr. Ian Logan.





Rasputin, published by Firebird Software in 1986.



Rasputin, published by Firebird Software in 1986.

He wanted to see the source code so we had to take a briefcase of thermal printouts. He was a bit surprised but was very good about it and understood. Amazing he didn't fall about laughing. He was a really nice guy and very helpful and even gave us a beta copy of the assembler we were using which worked with Microdrives; this was a big bonus. He must have liked us because we got the deal with Firebird and were also supplied with whatever development kit we wanted although this was still very primitive.

I gave up my regular job in the belief that there was a future in the games industry and started programming, drawing graphics and animation every hour of the day most days until the game was finished. The knowledge I gained in graphics and animation came in very useful for when I provided the shapes, animation and graphics for Rainbird's *Starglider* for the Atari ST.

Staglider on the Atari ST, published by Rainbird Software in 1987.

After finishing *Buggy Blast*, Dave decided he needed a break and returned to his music career. I spent months experimenting with ideas and eventually put forward the basic idea for the game that became *Rasputin*.

Probably one of the hardest things about the Spectrum in those days was the lack of any software for the creation of graphics or animation. I created all the graphics and animation using graph paper to plot the pixels and movement. The other pain was fitting everything into the 48K Spectrum's memory. I had to develop all sorts of software tricks to shrink the data.

I thoroughly enjoyed creating all the creatures and puzzles which became a wonderful joy when I was given a Spectrum 128K to create an upgraded version of *Rasputin*. The freedom of all that memory seemed fantastic in those days.

When I completed *Rasputin* I went out for dinner with some friends and realised that I had been working so many hours, without watching TV or reading papers, that I had nothing to talk about other than programming. I decided to get a life and went to work for Rainbird so that I could interact with those human things.

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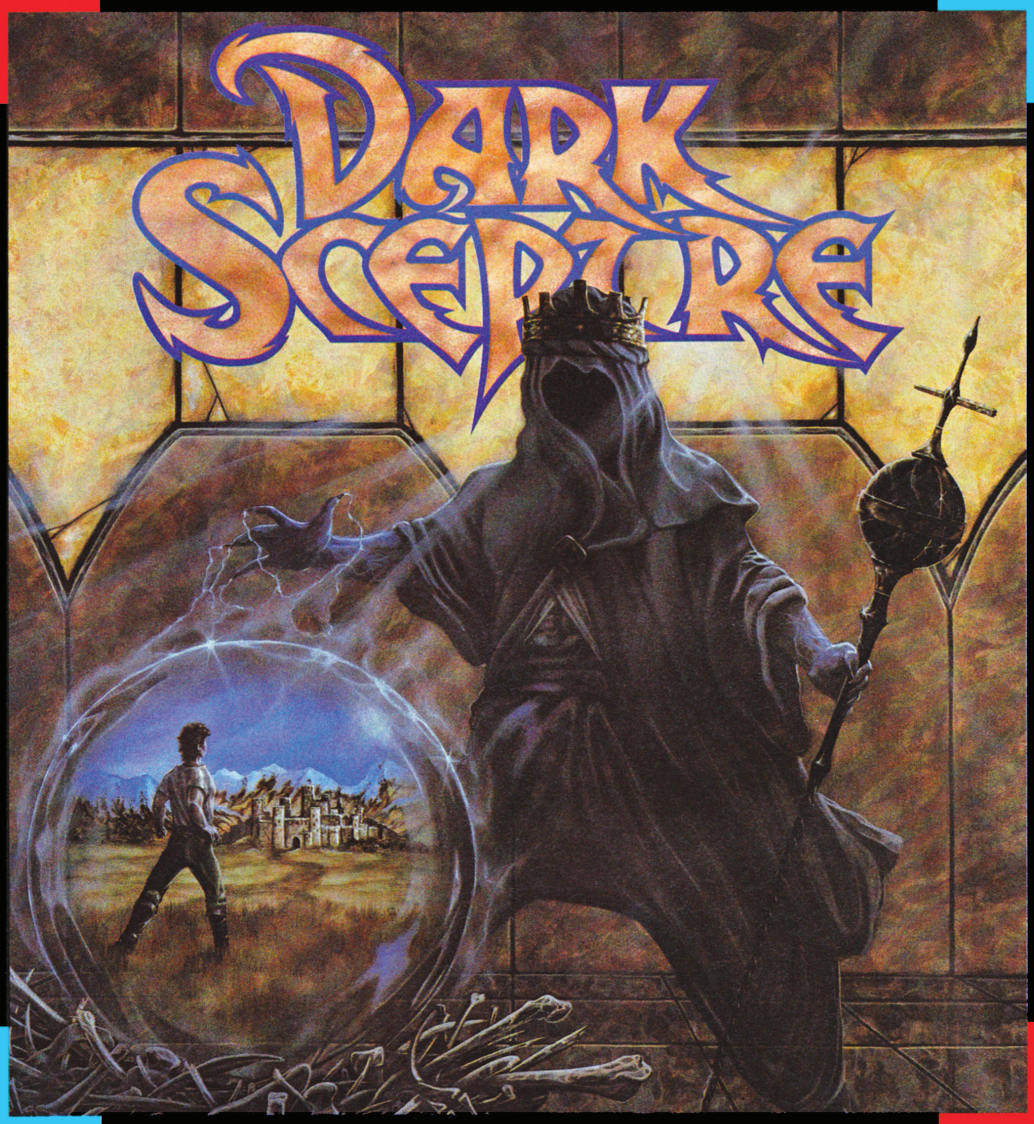

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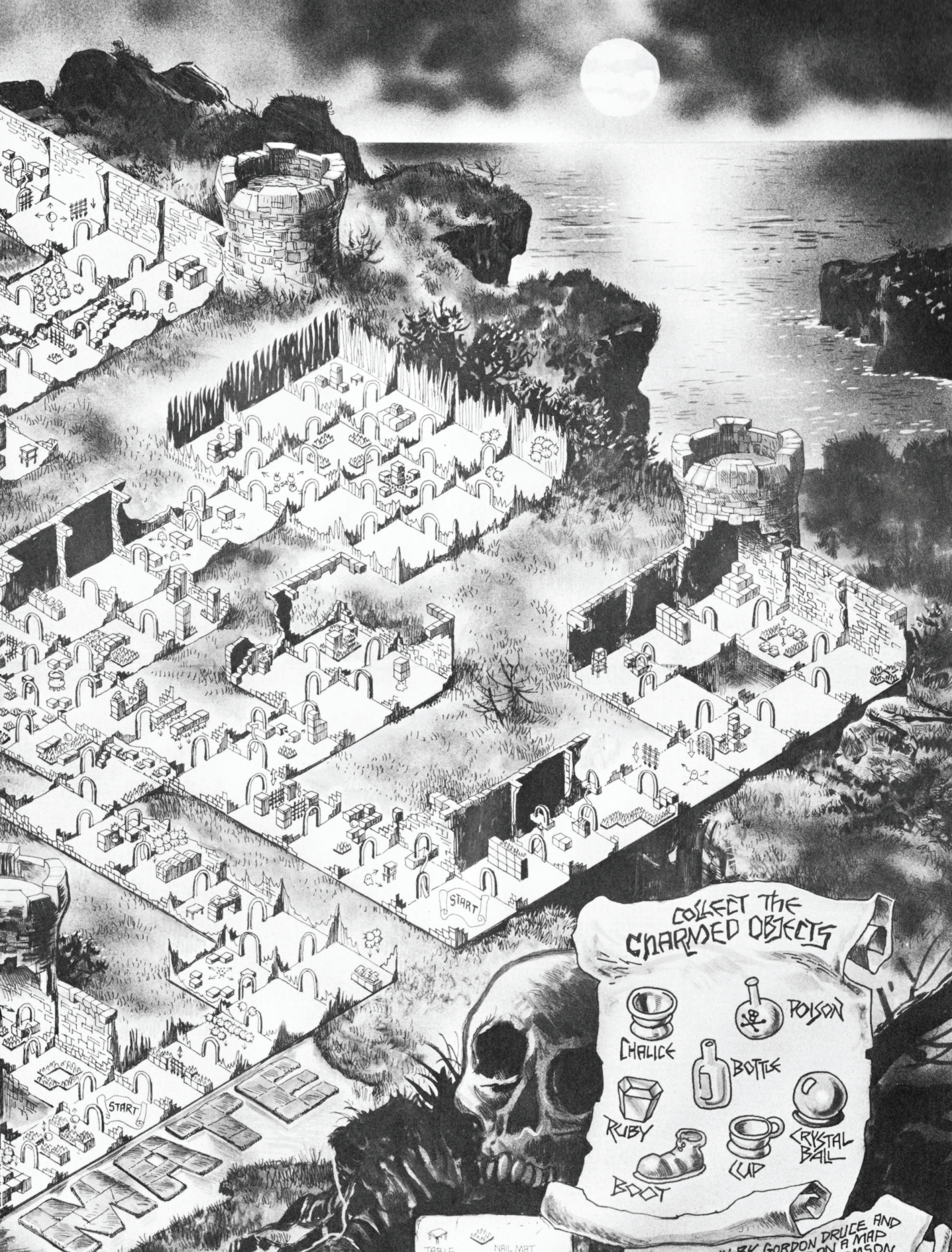
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In 1982 Sinclair Research Ltd, headed up by Clive Sinclair, launched the ZX Spectrum in the United Kingdom. This unassuming little 8-bit computer marked a turning point for the fortunes of the company and in turn sparked new hardware and software industries that made overnight celebrities of bedroom coders, such as Matthew Smith and Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith. The ZX Spectrum was a much loved phenomenon which continues to be celebrated to this day. This book takes the reader back to the dawn of the computer revolution, showcasing the games and hardware through imagery and personal narrative.

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'It made a generation who can code' - MJ Hibbett

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